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PRACTICAL SERMONS.

VOL. I.

PRACTICAL SERMONS.

By ABRAHAM REES, D.D. F.R.S.
EDITOR OF THE NEW CYCLOPÆDIA.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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1809.

TO THE

MEMBERS AND SUBSCRIBERS OF

THE CONGREGATION OF PROTESTANT DISSENTERS,

ASSEMBLING AT THE MEETING-HOUSE

IN THE OLD JEWRY,

THESE TWO VOLUMES OF SERMONS,

APPROVED BY THE CANDOUR AND PUBLISHED AT

THE REQUEST OF MANY WHO HEARD THEM,

ARE RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED;

AS A TOKEN OF AFFECTIONATE ESTEEM AND

UNFEIGNED GRATITUDE,

BY THEIR PASTOR, FRIEND, AND WELL-WISHER,

ABRAHAM REES.

King's Road, Gray's Inn, April, 1809.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Sermons were transcribed by the Author from his short-hand copies amidst numerous and urgent engagements; and they were committed to the press, as they were delivered, without any addition or alteration. The partiality of his friends induced them to request that he would put them in possession of some of those discourses which they had heard from the pulpit; and as he had for many years experienced their candour, he was the less reluctant in complying with their wishes. The Author, however, is not unapprised, that personal considerations may have misled the judgment of those who have long attended his ministry; and he, therefore, presents this specimen of his professional labours with great diffidence to the public. Having been encouraged in those departments of literature and science, to which many years of his life have been devoted, he

flatters himself with the hope, that his performances in the discharge of the duties of his profession, which he has always considered as his primary and most important duties, will be candidly received; and that persons, who are accustomed to the perusal of practical discourses on religious and moral subjects, will derive some degree of satisfaction and improvement from those, that now solicit their attention. If this end be answered, the Author will think himself amply compensated for the labour bestowed on transcribing them; and it will give him pleasure to reflect, that the families of his friends will possess this relic of his esteem and respect long after death has terminated their mutual connection and intercourse. Beyond this period he directs his views and hopes to a happy reunion, that shall be indissoluble and everlasting.

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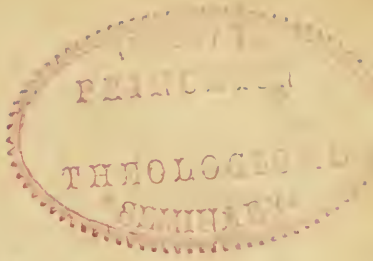

SERMON I.

THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF PROPHECY IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES ATTENDING THE INTRODUCTION AND PROGRESS OF CHRISTIANITY.

ISAIAH, lx. 22.

A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation. I the Lord will hasten it in his time.

BY this bold and figurative, but very intelligible and emphatical language, does the prophet foretel the rapid advancement of Christianity from an origin, apparently the most humble and obscure, to a degree of credit and influence, which excited the attention and the astonishment of the world. Isaiah lived at the distance of between seven and eight hundred years from the period in which this signal event was to occur; and nothing could be more im-

probable than the effect which he describes, compared with the means and the speed of its production. If, instead of dictating a truth which he derived from divine inspiration, he had been merely delivering his own conjectures, he would not have contrasted so great a revolution in the faith and worship of mankind as he had been delineating, with a cause seemingly so inadequate to its accomplishment. The conversion of a considerable part of the Gentile world to the belief and profession of Christianity, if it had occurred at all to the imagination of the Jewish prophet in contemplating the events of futurity, must have appeared of such magnitude, that he would have devised means and allowed time for effecting it, more suitable to the difficulty, importance, and extent of the undertaking. He could not have expected that the Jews, to whom his declaration was announced, would have given him any credit, or that they would have treated him otherwise than as a wild and frantic enthusiast, if he had connected such an end with means so incongruous, and, according to human estimation, so insufficient, to its attainment. But if they regarded him as a prophet, supernaturally inspired, and communicating the oracles of God, they would have been less scrupulous

in admitting the truth of his prediction and the probability of its accomplishment. Indeed, Isaiah himself precludes hesitation and doubt, by expressly ascribing the wonderful effect he announces to the immediate interposition of the wisdom and power of God. *A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation. I the Lord will hasten it in his time.*

The prophet directs the views of his contemporaries through a succession of more than seven centuries, to the introduction and establishment of the Christian doctrine; and he traces it from its origin amidst various disadvantages and discouragements, through the subsequent stages of its spread and influence, till it obtained the most signal and extensive triumph. Although its first advocates were few and feeble, they gained an accession of new converts; and their increase was so considerable and so rapid, as to warrant his attributing it to the immediate interposition of God.

Such are the facts, which Isaiah prophesies in the words of the text; and if we examine the history of the first plantation of Christianity in the world, we shall find that the prediction was, in every circumstance attending it, punctually accomplished.

Let us contemplate Christianity in its first

introduction, and we shall perceive the aptitude of the description in the text, which represents it as commencing its progress without that kind of patronage and support, that was likely to ensure its credit and success. *A little one*, says the prophet, *shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation.* Whilst he is professedly describing a very extraordinary revolution that was to take place in the state of the world at a future period, he speaks, in the most degrading and discouraging terms, of the number and abilities, of the rank and influence, of the persons by whom it was to be effected. He seems, therefore, to be uniting contradictions; signal success with the most feeble instruments; the most important end with the most ineffectual means; the conversion of the world with talents and powers unequal to its accomplishment. Nothing could be more improbable than that a cause which commenced so unfavourably should terminate so gloriously; and unless that Being, by the counsels of whose wisdom, and the operations of whose power, the event was secured, had communicated the discovery, it never could have been suggested by the natural sagacity of the prophet. He never would have thought of connecting so astonishing a change in the religious sentiments

and practice of mankind, as that which Christianity produced, with means that appeared to human view so inadequate to the effect. But the fact verified the prediction; and, therefore, the prediction itself proceeded from the supernatural inspiration of God. The Almighty Sovereign of nature, who had planned the scheme, and who conducted it to its completion, revealed it to the prophet, and by him to the existing generation, many ages before the period of its accomplishment; and notwithstanding every seeming improbability of the event, it was the object of hope through successive generations and in various nations of the earth, till the prophecy was actually fulfilled.

Judea, which was the scene of its first developement, was an inconsiderable district of the eastern world; and though in former ages it had attracted the attention of surrounding nations, it had been gradually sinking with regard to its dignity and importance, as a separate and independent empire, for several centuries before the introduction of Christianity. In the year 63 before the commencement of the Christian era, it was subdued by Pompey, deprived of its liberty, and reduced into subjection to the Romans. In this state of vassalage, however, it retained the name and form of a distinct kingdom, and enjoyed many privileges

under the protection of the Roman state, to which it was tributary. To a country thus humbled and degraded, few persons, who have been accustomed to estimate the origin and progress of great events, according to the ordinary course of the world, would direct their views for any signal achievement in favour either of science or religion. The spirit and condition of a declining state and of civil bondage are by no means propitious to any mental exertion, or to any improvement in knowledge or in virtue. The inhabitants of Judea, at the time of our Saviour's advent, were neither so situated nor so disposed, as to afford any reason for imagining, that they would make any successful effort towards ameliorating the principles and the practice of mankind; and it appears, by the event, that they wished rather to engross to themselves the religious privileges they possessed, than to share either them or any others of a more excellent kind with neighbouring nations.

To Rome rather than to Judea; to the conquerors of the world rather than to the oppressed and tributary inhabitants of a vanquished and despised province; to those who, like the Romans and the Athenians, were indulging and encouraging a spirit of inquiry and improvement, rather than to the Jews, who were averse from every innovation in their reli-

gious creed and forms of worship; it was most natural to look for persons capable of contriving and executing any great design in favour of knowledge and religion. Nevertheless, in Judea, a country of very small extent, subjugated by the victorious arms of Rome, and degraded by its dependent, tributary state, did that plan of instructing and reforming the world originate, which by degrees extended its influence to neighbouring nations, and gained converts and votaries amongst those who had been accustomed to treat the inhabitants of the territory from which it sprung with contempt and insult. In Bethlehem, and not in Jerusalem, the capital of Judea, was that divine Teacher and Saviour born; and in Nazareth, proverbially mean and despicable, did HE spend the earlier period of his life, who was destined, by the wisdom of Providence, to establish a kingdom of truth and righteousness, which was to become universal and perpetual.

Thus obscure in his nativity and origin; thus destitute of the distinctions and advantages that result from an illustrious birth and parentage, from the early instruction of the wise and learned, and from the recommendation and patronage of the affluent and powerful; was the founder of that religion, which gradually triumphed over the ignorance and error, the pre-

judices and passions, of mankind. For thirty years of his life did Jesus of Nazareth seclude himself from the world; neither associating with the Scribes and Pharisees, nor courting the favour and protection of the Jewish Sanhedrim, with a view to the success of his undertaking.

If he had needed secular countenance and support, it would have been his wisdom to have secured the esteem and patronage of the religious teachers and civil rulers of the country, in which he was soon to declare the purposes of his mission. But conscious of the superior powers which he possessed, he not only neglected to seek, but declined to accept, any assistance, which he might have obtained from men, both of higher and lower condition, who wished to emancipate themselves from the dominion of Rome, to which they had been subject for near a century.

When by the light of authentic history we contemplate our divine Saviour announcing his mission, unintroduced and unsupported by any body of men, possessing authority and influence either in the church or in the state, we are ready to imagine that disappointment and disgrace must soon terminate his views and labours. In the ordinary course of the world nothing was less likely than his success. No

human sagacity could augur any other event than the total failure of his undertaking; and, independently of the supernatural powers which he manifested, and of the predictions which he was accomplishing, he must be regarded as an honest and benevolent, but a deluded and pitiable, enthusiast; and it would require no extraordinary penetration to foresee the disastrous and ignominious fate that awaited him. *Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?* would have been the contemptuous retort of those who were the auditors of his doctrine. *Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him?* would have been considered as an ample refutation of all his claims and pretensions. By such methods he would have been speedily silenced and disgraced.

Moreover, what assistance could he have expected to derive from the votaries of his cause and the associates of his labours? They were few in number; they were selected from the most humble stations; some of them had been engaged in the meaner occupations, and others in a profession the most obnoxious in Judea, that of publicans or collectors of the Roman taxes. The concurrence and support of such persons could have given little celebrity to the Christian cause, and were not likely to attract the notice of the world; they could

have contributed but in a very small degree to its prevalence and spread; more especially, when we contrast against the small number, mean abilities, and inferior rank of our Lord's coadjutors, the talents and influence, the prejudice and zeal of those with whom they had to contend. The pride of philosophy; the obstinacy of religious prepossessions; worldly interest and honour; the imperiousness of corrupt passion; the difficulty of self-denial and mental discipline; and the terrors of persecution, would have furnished various obstacles, which it would not be easy to surmount, and would serve to unite men in a confederacy against Christ and his colleagues, who were engaged in reforming the religious principles and the moral practice of the world; in abolishing Jewish and Heathen rites of worship; and in substituting the devotion of the understanding and heart, and holiness of temper and conduct, for outward forms and ceremonies.

By thus comparing the low circumstances and inconsiderable influence of our Lord and his Apostles with the number and power of their adversaries; and the nature and magnitude of the object, to the accomplishment of which they were devoted, with the disadvantages and difficulties that obstructed their success; we perceive the propriety of the prophetic descrip-

tion in the text; *a* LITTLE ONE *shall become a thousand, and a* SMALL ONE *a strong nation.* The fact literally corresponded to the prediction: the means by which the illumination and conversion of the world were to be effected, the instruments that were employed for this purpose, and the scene in which they commenced their operations, were such as human wisdom would never have selected; and if they had not been concerted by a counsel and aided by a co-operation superior to those of men, they would have been altogether unsuitable and inadequate to the end to which they were subservient. The prophecy was, therefore, the dictate of divine inspiration, and the fulfilment of it exhibited a signal display of divine wisdom and power.

The truth of this observation will farther appear, if we trace Christianity from its origin and commencement in circumstances, which to human judgment afforded no encouraging expectation, through the subsequent stages of its extensive prevalence and duration. The sun of righteousness burst, with effulgent rays, through the clouds that enveloped it at its first dawn on Judea; and enlightened contiguous and remote nations. The sound of the Christian doctrine, though at first uttered, as it were, with a whisper and in a retired district of the

eastern world, *went forth*, as the Scripture says, *through all the earth;* that is, through the whole Roman empire; and the followers of the Saviour, who were few in number and of very obscure condition, increased to a great multitude. Our Lord's declaration to his disciples, whom he denominates a *little flock*, and who were, in fact, of little account, as to their number, their talents, and their circumstances; —our Lord's declaration, *It is my father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom*, was actually verified. Their religion triumphed over all opposition. Thousands and tens of thousands were converted to the faith of Christ. The boundaries of his kingdom of truth and grace were extended to the remotest regions of the habitable globe. In Jerusalem and Judea, the scene of his life and labours, of his teaching and miracles, of his sufferings and death, of his resurrection and ascension; at and immediately after the time, when the events of his history occurred; the number of proselytes to the faith and profession of Christianity gradually increased, and it gained new accessions, at the passover and at the pentecost, of various persons, who attended those feasts, and who, on their return to their own habitations, disseminated the Christian doctrine through the remoter parts of Judea and the adjacent pro-

vinces. The extensive conquests of the Romans, and the general peace that prevailed under the reign of Augustus, contributed likewise to the more easy and more enlarged diffusion of Christianity. The apostles availed themselves of the communication that was thus opened between different countries subject to the same empire; and their success was so great, that, before the destruction of Jerusalem, in a period of less than forty years, the gospel was not only preached in the lesser Asia, and Greece and Italy, which were then the principal theatres of action in the world; but it was likewise propagated as far northward as Scythia, to the south as far as Ethiopia, on the east to Parthia and India, and to the west as remotely as Spain and even Britain. (See Bishop Newton's Works, Vol. viii. p. 237.)

But although the conquests of the Romans facilitated an intercourse between different nations; they afforded no protection or encouragement to the spread of the Christian doctrine. This doctrine directly militated against the established religion of the empire: it inculcated the belief and worship of one God, in opposition to the polytheism and idolatry that every where prevailed; and it prohibited all who embraced it from associating at the altars and in the temples with those who conformed to the religion of

the state. They would, therefore, be considered as adversaries to the national faith and worship, and they were actually treated as such. Their increase was dreaded as a public evil; they were restrained and punished; and under various pretences and unjust charges they were calumniated, apprehended, and put to death. At Rome and in the remoter provinces of the empire they were persecuted with malignity and violence; and by the instigation of Nero in particular, that monster of dissimulation and of cruelty, they were tortured and destroyed with a ferocity, the history of which makes us shudder while we read it. Nevertheless, persecution animated their zeal and augmented their number. Although many of them suffered a premature death, those who survived and escaped supplied the loss, which the cause of Christianity sustained, by extraordinary activity and resolution in promoting it. The destruction of Jerusalem contributed likewise to the dispersion of the Christians as well as the Jews; confirmed the former in their attachment to their religion, and quickened their solicitude for extending its beneficial influence.

By the various concurring circumstances which we have now recited, Christianity was widely diffused even in the first age; and in the two succeeding centuries, when the powers

of the world were armed against it, it maintained its ground and renewed its triumphs, vanquished the opposition of its enemies, and obtained in every nation, where it was introduced, a multitude of new converts. The prediction of the text was, therefore, signally and literally verified in the extensive propagation of Christianity: *a little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation.*

But it deserves farther to be considered, that the propagation of Christianity was as rapid as it was extensive. The number of persons, who associated with Christ and attached themselves to his cause, during the short period of his public ministry, commonly computed not to exceed three years, was very considerable, notwithstanding native prejudices, contemptuous treatment, and discouraging prospects; and in a few days after his ascension we read of one hundred and twenty persons who publicly avowed themselves his disciples, on the scene of his ignominy and death. To these we may add many others, of superior and subordinate rank, who had not resolution to make an open profession, though they were secretly devoted to him and to his cause. This class comprehends Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Gamaliel, and several more, who were probably believers;

but dreaded the consequence of testifying their faith by enlisting visibly under his banner.

Whilst the apostles continued at Jerusalem, concerting the plan of their future operations, the number of avowed Christians was augmented by the accession of five thousand new converts. To these many more were daily added, as the history informs us, of such as believed. When the apostles afterwards departed from Jerusalem in pursuit of the several objects of their mission, success every where attended them; and before the expiration of thirty years, after their master's departure from the world, they had established churches through almost the whole extent of the Roman empire. Tacitus, a heathen historian, represents the number of Christians at Rome in the tenth year of Nero, or the thirtieth year after the ascension of Christ, as a "great multitude;" and about eighty years after the same period, the younger Pliny, speaking of the progress of Christianity in the lesser Asia, observes, that, "the contagion of this superstition," as he calls it, "had not only seized cities, but the smaller towns and the open country; and that it had produced a visible desertion of the temples and of the customary rites of Gentile worship."

We might trace the subsistence and spread

of the Christian faith through succeeding periods, and allege the testimonies, both of Heathen and Christian writers, in proof of its diffusion and prevalence, till at last the Roman Empire became Christian under Constantine in the beginning of the fourth century. During the whole interval that elapsed from the introduction of Christianity to this time, it suffered a variety of persecutions; and notwithstanding the numerous and severe conflicts that discouraged its advocates and threatened its utter extinction, it subsisted and prevailed; and there is reason to believe, that Christians were the most powerful body in the Roman Empire, when Constantine took them under his protection.

The only fact which history furnishes, that bears any kind of resemblance to the progress of Christianity, is that of the Mahometan religion; but the propagation of Mahomet's imposture was owing to causes peculiar to itself. We may observe, in general, that whilst it depended on the mere powers of persuasion, its progress was so slow, that in three years it gained only fourteen proselytes, and for ten years it was wholly confined within the walls of Mecca. The success of Mahomet was afterwards owing to the powers of the sword, to which he was much more indebted than to any arguments he

could use; however artfully they were adapted to the circumstances of the age and country in which he lived, and to the disposition of the people among whom he made proselytes.

The spread of Christianity was an event of a very different kind. It counteracted the prejudices and passions of mankind; it was awed, oppressed and persecuted; and yet, without any worldly succour, and in defiance of every hostile power, it prevailed and prospered: and its prevalence was so extensive and so rapid, that before the destruction of Jerusalem, or within forty years after the public ministration of its founder, it had pervaded, as we have already observed, every part of the Roman Empire, and gained converts in almost every country of the known world.

Thus did *a little one become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation:* and the revolution, considering its nature and importance, and the means of its accomplishment, was so sudden, that it can be attributed to no other cause besides the counsel of divine wisdom and the concurring efficacy of divine power: that wisdom which directs and that power which brings to their completion all events. *I the Lord will hasten it in its due season!* When the fulness of the time was come; when that period had arrived, to which a series of prophecies directed men's

views, and which, in a variety of respects, was the most proper for the purpose of enlightening and reforming the world; then did the Sovereign of nature interpose, and send forth his Son Jesus Christ, endowed with supernatural powers, and invested with a special commission for giving knowledge of salvation to mankind, and for guiding their feet into the way of righteousness and peace.

The success of Christianity affords one convincing evidence, in connection with the circumstances that attended it, of its divine origin. It proves, that its author was a divine messenger; that he was directed and aided by the wisdom and power of God; and that the supreme sovereign of nature, who has access to the minds of men, and an absolute controul over the course of events, was with him of a truth. Of his celestial origin and extraordinary powers we have ample evidence in the history of his life; in the manner of his introduction into the world and investiture with his office; in the superior excellence of his doctrine; in the irreproachable tenour of his conduct; in the miracles which he wrought; in the predictions which he delivered, and in those which were accomplished in and by him; in the circumstances of his death and resurrection; and in the abilities which he communicated to

his apostles and disciples after his ascension into heaven:—all these particulars afford abundant testimony to his heavenly origin and commission, and leave no room for doubt that *as the Father gave him commandment, so he spake;* and that the undertaking, which he appeared in the world to execute, was committed to him by the Parent and Sovereign of mankind. The work which he performed was worthy of God. The manner in which it was executed testified to the operation of divine wisdom and power. Those who were employed succeeded, because they were instructed and assisted by the source of all knowledge and influence. Their success assures us, that the world is under the government of a righteous and benevolent Providence; and that the gospel shall ultimately triumph over all error and vice, and become the light and the joy of the whole universe. It has already subsisted and prevailed beyond human expectation. Ancient predictions have been already fulfilled against the natural probability of events. Prophecies of its duration and farther progress remain to be accomplished; and we may rest assured, by the review of past occurrences, that they will certainly be fulfilled.

In the mean while, let the events which we have now been contemplating serve to strengthen

our faith in the counsel and agency of divine Providence; increase our attachment to the faith and profession of Christianity; excite and encourage our trust in its invaluable promises; and brighten our views of that more perfect and glorious state, which it sets before us.

Christianity has already triumphed over many enemies. It will still subsist and triumph, notwithstanding the indifference of some and the active opposition of others. It should be our ambition to contribute to its subsistence and triumph, and to be fellow-workers with God in maintaining and promoting it. Our consolation and hope are nearly connected with the truth and duration of our holy religion: and if we transmit to future generations what is the inestimable source of our own encouragement and joy amidst the weaknesses of nature and the vicissitudes of the world, we shall convey to them the richest inheritance, which we can give or they receive.

We see at present but a part of the triumph to which Christianity shall attain. Its progress towards perfection, though more slow and gradual than it once was, is no less certain. It is vain to expect any distinguished amelioration and improvement in the state of the world, till its principles are better understood, its genuine

spirit more generally imbibed, and the practice inculcated by it more ostensibly prevalent. We have no reason to dread the ultimate issue, however we may be discouraged by present appearances. The language of prophecy and the evidence of past facts concur in assuring us, that our holy religion is the care of Heaven; that an almighty Providence is its guardian in every changing scene; and that it will finally prevail and triumph. No weapon that is formed against it; no combination of efforts for undermining and abolishing it, can prosper. Its adversaries would do well to consider, that it is equally fruitless and culpable and ignominious to be found contending against God. His counsel shall stand. His purpose shall be accomplished. To resist and to counteract his declared will are as unavailable as they are criminal and disgraceful. But whatever may be the number or the rank of those who believe and profess Christianity in any present period or state of the world; of this we are assured, that those who will finally share its benefits will form a *great multitude of all nations and kindred and people and tongues.* In this countless multitude of glorified and happy beings may we be distinguished and honoured! May we share and celebrate the triumphs of our di-

vine Saviour, when he shall come arrayed in glorious majesty to *be admired of all who believe*, and to complete the purposes of his mission and undertaking by rendering their felicity perfect and eternal! Amen.

SERMON II.

THE OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH, A PERMANENT MEMORIAL OF THE TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY.

ACTS, XX. 7.

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them.

THERE is not an event in the history of the world more important in itself and more interesting to mankind than the resurrection of Christ. If this event really happened in the manner recorded in the New Testament, it affords an evidence in favour of Christianity, which is of itself sufficient to produce conviction, and which enforces on our regard the doctrines, and duties, and prospects of our holy religion with a divine authority. The sacred writers were duly sensible of the im-

portance of this fact; and, therefore, one of them observes, that *if Christ be not raised, our faith is vain.* This single fact comprehends the various proofs, deduced from miracle, prophecy, and testimony. It was, in the strictest sense, supernatural. It was repeatedly predicted by our Lord himself. It was, in its own nature, and in the circumstances that attended it, a signal testimony on the part of Almighty God, in favour of his claims and character, as a divine messenger and saviour. None who admit the truth of the resurrection of Christ can reasonably dispute his mission from God, or consistently withhold from him that respect and obedience to which his character and undertaking entitle him.

The evidence of this fact is, therefore, a subject of very interesting inquiry, and has engaged the attention of the advocates of Christianity more than any other. It is not my present intention to enumerate the various arguments that have been urged in proof of this fact. It will be sufficient to observe, that our faith in it is founded on the most unexceptionable testimony; and that, as there is no fact of such importance as this, there is not one in the annals of mankind, the credibility of which has been so satisfactorily established. Without admitting its credibility, how can we account

for the surprising revolution which the belief of it produced in the opinions and practice of mankind;—of those, whose native prejudices and worldly interest militated against their conviction;—of those, who lived at the time when it is reported to have happened, and on the scene of the whole transaction;—and of others, in distant places and succeeding ages, equally tenacious of their sentiments and equally obstinate in their attachments, who had an opportunity of examining the nature of the evidence, which constrained their assent? The change which this event, and the religion established by it, have produced in the tenets and conduct of mankind, has been not only extensive but durable. It has been gradual and progressive. It has subsisted and prevailed, notwithstanding many disadvantages and conflicts. We discern the effects of it in our own day. The presumption, which we derive from hence in favour of the truth of the fact, from which such a revolution originated, and on which its prevalence and duration depend, amounts to an actual proof of it; and corroborates every other argument that has been alleged in attestation to it.

We shall not now attempt to do justice to the subject in this general view of it; but confine our attention to the single circumstance, sug-

gested in the text; which informs us, that *on the first day of the week*, the disciples were assembled for religious purposes, and that on this occasion *Paul preached to them.* This was the day of our Saviour's resurrection; and it was observed by the disciples in grateful and devout commemoration of this event. The preceding day was the Jewish Sabbath; instituted in the migration of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan, and observed during our Lord's life and ministry both by himself and his disciples, as well as by the Jews in general. But this had been the day, on which our Saviour remained under the arrest of death, and it must have been a day of dejection and anxious suspense to his followers. They could not soon nor easily forget the sorrow and terror which they had experienced. Their recollection of this day tended to revive many painful impressions; and it was, by no means, suitable to the sentiments and spirit, which a rational devotion is designed to cherish and improve. But the day of our Lord's resurrection was a day of gratitude and triumph. It rescued his character from the ignominy of the cross. It completed the course of his ministry upon earth. It encouraged their confidence in him as a divine Teacher and Saviour. It confirmed all those principles and hopes, which

his doctrine had led them to entertain. It assured them of ultimate success and victory in their attachment to his cause.

Accustomed as they had been to appropriate one day in seven to the purposes of religion, it must occur to them that no day could be more proper, under the dispensation of Christianity which was now established, and which was to supersede the local and temporary constitution of the Jews, than that which had been marked by so distinguishing an event in the history of the founder of their religion. No day could be so suitable to the exercises of devotion and moral improvement as that which convinced them of the overruling providence of God, engaged in the rescue of oppressed virtue, and extending its dominion over death and the grave. Whether, therefore, the disciples had any express direction or command for substituting the *first* day of the week in the room of the *seventh,* or Jewish Sabbath, or not; the transition from the one to the other was so natural and reasonable, as almost to preclude the necessity of any positive precept.

The religious observance of this day commenced soon after the event, which it was intended to commemorate. It became general in the Christian church. It has continued through succeeding ages to the present time

The original appropriation of the *first day of the week* to a religious use, and the uninterrupted application of it to this purpose, afford a strong presumptive argument in proof of the fact, which gave occasion to this selection of it.

We shall briefly illustrate this argument; and, then, apply it to the purpose of enforcing a regular observance of the Christian Sabbath.

It is a well-known fact, authenticated by sacred and profane history, that the Jewish Sabbath was generally observed in Judea at the time of our Saviour's public ministry: it is equally certain that the first day of the week was substituted for it among the professors of Christianity, soon after the period assigned to the resurrection of its author. This change cannot be satisfactorily accounted for without admitting, that Jesus Christ did really rise from the dead. Such an extraordinary event, if it actually happened, would deserve public commemoration: it would form an era in the history of those who professed to believe it. They would be naturally disposed to appropriate the weekly return of it to religious purposes;—to those purposes, which the event itself was designed to encourage and promote. But if no such event had hap-

pened, no appointment of this kind could have taken place: there was nothing that could possibly lead to it; and that could either justify the introduction or enforce the observance of it.

Can we imagine, that our Lord's first disciples and apostles would have thought of an institution which superseded the obligation of the Jewish Sabbath? Most of them were Jews by birth and profession: they had been educated in the Jewish religion: they had been accustomed to think with reverence of the law of the Sabbath: their veneration of it inclined even to the extreme of superstition: they had been habituated to the punctilious observance of it. Would men, thus educated and disposed, propose an alteration in their sacred day, that must be so contrary to all their native prepossessions and attachments? Would they break down one of the principal barriers that separated them from other nations; and in doing this, abandon the profession of their youth and riper years? Such an alteration could never have suggested itself to their minds. No impostor could have prevailed with them to adopt it. Nothing but truth and conviction could have induced them to desert, in this instance, the practice of their ancestors, and the practice to which they

themselves had been rigidly devoted. Much less would they have endeavoured to detach their countrymen from the observance of a day which was universally held sacred among them. Unless Christ had risen from the dead, according to his promise, and thus had overcome their prejudices and scruples with regard to his divine mission and character, they would never have established a day in commemoration of him: they would never have assembled to perpetuate their own delusion, and to publish to the world a memorial of their own disgrace.

Besides, nothing but a conviction of the reality of our Lord's resurrection could have induced them to set apart a day in honour of this event; and their success in establishing and effecting the observance of it, proves the truth of the fact, which gave occasion to it. By deserting the synagogues on the Jewish Sabbath, and assembling for social worship *on the first day of the week;* by associating on this day, in remembrance of the resurrection of Christ, they exposed themselves to the notice of their enemies: they provoked a scrutiny into the reality of this fact: they gave all, who were desirous of satisfying themselves, an opportunity of doing it, and furnished them with powerful inducements for this purpose. No

verbal declaration, however frequently repeated or publicly delivered, could afford so strong a testimony, on the part of the disciples, of their belief of this fact, as the appointment of a day for the commemoration of it. Nothing could be more likely to excite the resentment of their adversaries, to make them assiduous in examining its truth, and to unite them in every attempt for disproving it, if this had been possible, than the observance of a public day, with a view of perpetuating the knowledge and belief of it. Such conduct was a direct and explicit censure on the incredulity of the Jews, which their pride and prejudice, and every principle that engaged them in an opposition to Christianity, would have rendered them anxious to obviate and remove. Unless the fact of our Lord's resurrection had been publicly known, generally admitted, and absolutely incontestible, the disciples would never have presumed on establishing this monument of its truth; they would never have offered such an insult to the understanding of their countrymen; nor could they have engaged in so absurd and impracticable an attempt, as this must have been. If the event which their Master predicted had never happened, the day on which they were led to expect it, would have been a day of disappointment, self-humi-

liation, and sorrow. Had they deluded themselves, during his public ministry, with false hopes, this *first day of the week* would have detected their self-delusion. Ashamed of their own credulity, they would never have attempted to impose on that of others; and to record, as a fact, an event, which they knew had never happened. Incensed, as well as disappointed, they must have wished to forget, and they must have wished others also to forget, that they had been deceived; and they would never have thought of honouring a deceiver, or have endeavoured to procure for him the respect and confidence of others: or, if they had been conscious to themselves of a design to deceive, they would never have appropriated a day to the solemn exercises of religion;—a weekly interval of self-condemnation and reproach: in which they professedly assembled for the purpose of inculcating integrity by the awe of God and futurity, whilst they were practising falsehood and imposture.

Had their self-delusion continued, after their expectations of their Master's resurrection had been disappointed, a public record of this event, a weekly commemoration of it, was one of the most effectual methods which they could have devised, for guarding others against de-

ceit, and for provoking a scrutiny, which would have utterly ruined their cause.

Upon the whole, it must appear, that the appointment of the *first day of the week* for social worship, and as a substitute for the *seventh*, which was the Jewish Sabbath, could not have originated with the apostles and disciples themselves, independently of our Lord's resurrection. Nothing but the reality of this event can account for its first establishment, and for the observance of it in the earliest period of the Christian church. The first institutors and observers of it were men, whose prejudices were vanquished by truth, and who assembled on this day in preference to that which they had been accustomed to deem sacred, and which their countrymen and contemporaries venerated, from a full conviction that the founder of their religion had been miraculously raised from the dead.

Time produced a more general revolution in the sentiments and practice of mankind; and wherever Christianity prevailed, the *first day of the week* was appropriated to the purposes of religion. Nevertheless, this revolution was effected against strong prejudices, established custom, obstinate attachments, and violent opposition: it was effected without the

aid of human authority, by the gentle and gradual influence of truth and reason, long before magistrates and men of worldly power extended their protection to Christianity, and whilst the powers of the world were combined against it.

The observance of this day became the distinguishing badge of Christians. It was a practice by which they were known to the world and discovered to their enemies: yet so zealous were they in their attachment to it, that the threats and terrors of persecution, and the vigilance of their adversaries, did not prevent their assembling themselves together for the exercise of their religion on this day. When they were proscribed and punished for forsaking the Heathen temples, and associating together on occasions of this kind, they retained their veneration for *the first day of the week*, and regularly attended the sacred institutions peculiar to the day.

Let any one impartially consider these facts, and he cannot hesitate in acknowledging the reality and importance of the resurrection of Christ, as the only event in the history of the world that can satisfactorily account for so signal a revolution in the sentiments and practice of mankind.

If we regard this event as a miraculous interposition of divine Providence; as the seal of the Almighty affixed to the mission and character of Christ; as a solemn declaration of the truth of his doctrine and the efficacy of his mediatorial undertaking; and as a public memorial and pledge of the resurrection and immortality of all his faithful followers;—we need not wonder that a weekly commemoration of it should have been established and continued. The introduction and permanence of the day assigned to this important and useful purpose need not surprise us: but no policy and contrivance, no compact and confederacy, no constancy and zeal of the apostles and first disciples are equal to an effect so general and so lasting. Extensive and durable revolutions in the religious principles and profession of mankind require corresponding causes. No cause can be assigned, adequate to the appointment and continued observance of the *first day of the week*, as a day of social worship, if we reject the history of its origin and establishment, which is contained in the New Testament. As a memorial of the resurrection of Christ; as the means of promoting the spread and influence of his religion; as a bond of union to his disciples; and as affording opportunities for

exciting and strengthening their attachment to him and to one another, and for subserving the great design of his mission and undertaking; it was a very important and useful institution. It was wisely ordained; and its aptitude for answering the ends of its appointment will account for the attention which has been manifested to it by Christians of every country and age of the world. Amidst all the errors and corruptions that have prevailed; in the darker and more enlightened ages of Christianity; amongst those, who have differed most in their sentiments on a variety of other subjects, this day has been held in veneration:— and there is no period in the history of the Christian church, in which this institution has been wholly disregarded. Neither infidelity nor superstition; neither licentiousness nor enthusiasm; have so far degraded its importance and depreciated its utility, as altogether to alienate it from the purposes for which it was designed, and to obliterate from the human mind that regard which is due to it.

The inference from this reasoning is obvious. It must occur to every person, who properly considers the subject, that Jesus Christ, in honour of whose resurrection this day was originally appropriated to the social duties of religion, and in attestation to which fact the

observance of it has been continued in the Christian church, is a divine prophet and Saviour; and that the dispensation of grace and truth which he has established proceeds from God, and merits the regard of mankind.

It now remains that we apply the subject of this discourse to the purpose of enforcing a regular observance of the Christian Sabbath.

Some deference is due to the judgment and practice of those who were concerned in the first institution of it. They selected and set it apart for commemorating that signal fact on which their religion, and all the valuable privileges and hopes which it comprehends, were founded. They observed it, amidst reproach and persecution, and at the hazard of their possessions and lives, with a view of preserving the religion of Christ in the world, and transmitting its blessings to future ages. All who have a just sense of the excellence of Christianity, as a rule of life, and as a source of the most acceptable consolations and animating hopes, which the human mind can entertain, will reflect, with gratitude and veneration, on the conduct of the first Christians, and will be ambitious of resembling it. Did *they* expose themselves to distress and to death from a regard to the founder of our holy religion, and for the purpose of extending and conveying to

future generations the inestimable blessings of it, and shall we receive the sacred deposit, which they have transmitted to us, with indifference? Shall we hold in low estimation that which was the price of their blood? Shall we be reluctant or negligent in bearing our united testimony to the value of the privileges and benefits which we enjoy, as Christians? Should we not gratefully recollect, who were the instruments under Providence of securing them for us? How they were conveyed to us; and to what danger those who assembled themselves together for this purpose were exposed? Comparing our own circumstances with theirs, should we not be thankful for our unmolested liberty, and evince our sense of its value, by associating together in honour of that event, which they commemorated at the risk of their lives? We are as much interested in the regular observance of *the first day of the week* as they were. It is no less important to us than it was to them. If they assembled on this day to testify their faith in Christ, their reverence of his character, and their gratitude for the blessings of his gospel, and to maintain and promote his religion in the world; these are duties no less obligatory upon us.

It deserves to be considered, more particularly, that we thus manifest a becoming respect for the divine founder of our religion. We cannot be ignorant of the advantages we derive from it; nor is it necessary now to enumerate and illustrate them. Christianity is an invaluable blessing: its author is entitled to our esteem and gratitude. It will be readily allowed, that the most substantial honour we can render him is that of a temper and practice conformable to the precepts which he has prescribed, and the example which he has exhibited. With this plea some have excused themselves from those public exercises of religion to which the Christian Sabbath has been devoted. We shall not dispute the sincerity of the plea; but the subject of the present discourse evinces its insufficiency. One day in the week has been uniformly observed in honour of the character and religion of Christ. The circumstance that gave occasion to it was the most important event in his history: it was his triumph over death. In its reference to him and his cause, it was a joyful event. As such it has been celebrated, and a day has been set apart for this purpose. Those who believe this event, and who have a becoming sense of its importance, must esteem the day, which has been appro-

priated to the commemoration of it: they cannot neglect the public duties which constitute its chief distinction from other days; and by the performance of which they bear honourable testimony, in connection with their fellow-christians, to the religion they profess, and to the character of its founder. What is their private conduct, or what are their inward sentiments, the world does not know; how far they are honourable to Christ, or consistent with his religion, is known certainly only to God and to themselves: but their observance of the Christian Sabbath is a public act. As such, it is a tribute of respect to his office and character. This is an argument in favour of the social worship of this day, which cannot less than influence those, who have not renounced their faith in the Saviour.

It deserves further to be considered, that the religious observance of the Lord's day preserves the knowledge and maintains the influence of Christianity in the world. This was one design of its establishment; and this is one end to which it is admirably adapted. The day itself is a perpetual memorial of the truth and importance of Christianity. By employing it in the social acts of religion, we render it effectual for this purpose; we countenance and give the sanction of our example

to the design for which it is appointed, and, as far as our influence extends, perpetuate its utility. There are comparatively few, whose province it is to recommend religion by their writings, or by their teaching; but all, whatever be their abilities and station, may be its public advocates by their example. A regular attendance on the institutions of social worship will support its credit and promote its influence; and as long as one day in the week is duly observed, this practice will afford us the best security against ignorance, and licentiousness either of principles or of manners. It is to this practice that we are indebted for the blessings of Christianity; and thus only can we expect to transmit them to posterity. Would those, who desert the assemblies of their fellow-christians on this day, consider what injury their conduct does to religion, in the opinion of the multitude; how much it tends to weaken the influence of those principles, which need the support and sanction of social worship; and what advantage they give to those, who are the avowed enemies of Christianity both in their sentiments and in their practice; prudence and public spirit, not to say piety and a sense of duty, must overcome every prejudice, and render caution and counsel needless.

I shall only add, that the regular observance of the Christian Sabbath has a beneficial influence on the general temper and conduct: it contributes to make us living monuments of the truth and excellence of Christianity; it assists us in cherishing those views and hopes, with regard to futurity, which afford the most pleasing conviction of its value; and it enables us to bear grateful and joyful testimony to the efficacy of its divine principles, in circumstances of trial and danger, and in the prospect of judgment and retribution. The first Christians, by assembling on *the first day of the week*, receiving instruction, and engaging in the exercises of devotion, acquired fortitude and patience, suited to the trying occasions that occurred. The day, and the services of the day, are no less favourable to our security and progress in a course of piety and virtue. In proportion to the degree of our moral and religious improvement, will be the value of our testimony in favour of Christianity, and our experience of the benefits it confers; the more satisfactory will be our views of its evidence; and the more encouraging our conviction, that we are *begotten again by the resurrection of Christ from the dead to the lively hope of an inheritance that fadeth not away.*

Let what has been said serve to establish our faith in the doctrines and promises of the gospel. Let us *hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*, and let us abound in *those fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God.* Let us learn from this subject to bear our public testimony to the truth and excellence of Christianity by an observance of that day, which is the appointed memorial of the resurrection of its Author. There are many considerations, that evince and enforce the obligation of this duty: but the argument which is suggested by this discourse is of peculiar importance. We hereby testify our regard to him, who is *the Author and finisher of our faith;* to whom we are under immense obligations; and who is appointed to be the arbiter of our eternal state. We thus contribute to preserve and perpetuate his religion in the world;—that divine directory of our conduct and source of our consolations and hopes; which is the most valuable blessing conferred by the Father of mercies on the human race.

May these considerations, addressed to our sense of duty, gratitude, and interest, habitually influence our judgment and practice!

May none of us *forsake the assembling of ourselves together,* as the *manner of some is;* but by *sanctifying the Sabbath,* and carefully improving its sacred institutions, adorn our profession, recommend religion, derive resolution and succour suited to every season of trial, and *never be weary of well-doing; forasmuch as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord!*

SERMON III.

THE OBJECT AND NATURE OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP.

JOHN, iv. 24.

God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

THE grand question in debate between the Jews and the Samaritans related, not so much to the object or to the mode of religious worship, as to the place in which it was to be performed. The former resorted, for this purpose, to the temple, that was erected on Mount Zion, at Jerusalem, the capital of Judea; whilst the latter assembled on Mount Gerizim, near the city of Samaria, where, by permission of Darius, they had built a temple in imitation of that at Jerusalem. This trivial difference had excited and maintained a very considerable

degree of animosity between the inhabitants of Judea and those of Samaria; and the animosity had so long and so generally prevailed, that persons of every condition seemed to be interested in the dispute by which it was occasioned.

As soon as the woman of Samaria, to whose history the text refers, had reason to conclude, from our Lord's conversation with her, that he was a prophet, she applies to him for a solution of the question, that agitated the minds of her countrymen, and that had produced an irreconcileable discord between them and the Jews. *Our fathers*, says this woman, referring to the authority of Abraham and Jacob, who had built altars and offered sacrifices on Mount Gerizim, and to the uninterrupted practice of her countrymen ever since the temple had been erected, *worshipped in this mountain; and ye that are Jews say, that in Jerusalem is the place, where men ought to worship.* Possessed as she was with a full persuasion of the rectitude of their conduct, she had no doubt of obtaining a decision in her favour. Our Lord, in his reply, begins with correcting her mistake as to the importance of the subject in dispute, and with leading her to perceive that it was not of such a nature as to justify that separation and discord, which had long subsisted between the

Jews and the Samaritans. *Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall, neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the father.* The common parent of mankind will not receive any exclusive worship either in your temple or in that of the Jews. Every thing that is local in his worship is of temporary duration, and the period of its utter termination approaches. The question in debate, however ardently it has been agitated, and what ever pernicious consequences may have attended it, is of little moment; and, therefore, the attention of the disputants should be directed more to the *object* and *nature* of their religious worship, than to the place where it should be performed and the external ceremonies that attend it. He informs her, however, that the Jews were, upon the whole, better instructed than the Samaritans, and that salvation, by the advent of the Messiah, to whom persons of every nation ought now to direct their views, originated with them.

It was his province to introduce a worship more excellent in its nature, more comprehensive in its extent, and more permanent in its duration, than that which had been hitherto practised either by the Jews or by the Samaritans;—and he proceeds further to inform her, wherein consisted the difference between that

kind of worship, which they practised, and that which he was about to recommend and establish: *theirs* was local and ritual; and adapted only to a limited use and a temporary continuance; *that*, which he introduced, was designed to comprehend all nations and to endure through all future ages. It was founded on reasons of universal obligation; and it was intended to produce effects of unlimited and everlasting duration. *The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

From this declaration we deduce the nature of that worship, which is equally obligatory and acceptable in every nation of the world, and in every period of time; and the fundamental principle in which it originates, and by which it is enforced.

Let us inquire what constitutes that religious worship, which our Saviour inculcates, and which he directs us to perform *in spirit and in truth;* and then enforce it by an illustration of the principle, on which it is founded. There is an evident contrast between that kind of worship, which our Saviour enjoined, and that which was practised by the Jews and Samari-

tans; and by attending to this circumstance, we shall rightly apprehend what he means by worshipping God *in spirit and in truth.*

Spiritual worship is, first and principally, that of the understanding; and consists in just and honourable sentiments concerning the being, perfections, and character of God, who is the supreme object of it. It originates in a persuasion of the existence of God:—such a persuasion as is suggested to us and abundantly confirmed by the works of nature, the dispensations of Providence, and the testimony of revelation. Nor is this simple persuasion, that there is a God, the first cause and sovereign ruler of the universe, of itself sufficient to direct our worship, or to render it either acceptable to its object or beneficial to ourselves. We must form some conceptions of his attributes and character; of our relation to him and dependance upon him; and of his concern for our welfare. Our ideas of an invisible, incomprehensible, infinite, and eternal Being, must, after the utmost exertion of our mental faculties, be extremely inadequate. Nevertheless, with a proper degree of attention, they will be sufficient to command our reverence and homage.

The unity of this Being is the primary and fundamental idea which we should form con-

cerning him; and in this notion of him we shall be confirmed by a due consideration of his natural and moral attributes, and by adverting to the discoveries and declarations of his word. The first cause of all existence, himself underived, must be *one being*. Variety and multiplicity of co-equal and co-existent beings, each of them infinite and eternal, are altogether incomprehensible and incredible. If we ascribe self-origination and independence, immensity and eternity, and every conceivable perfection, to one being; we necessarily exclude others from a participation. These attributes can, in their nature, belong only to a single being; extending his presence through all space, his knowledge to all creatures and all events, his agency to all effects; his existence and dominion to every period of an everlasting duration.

The only consistent idea we can entertain concerning God is that of a Being, in whom all possible perfection resides; and one such Being is sufficient to be recognized and honoured, as the object of our supreme veneration and worship. Such is the notion, which the survey of nature leads us to form concerning God; and such is the notion, which the Scriptures uniformly inculcate. *There is one God* is the declaration that occurs in numberless

passages of the Old Testament: it is once and again repeated in the New Testament. *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God,* says our Saviour, *and him only shalt thou serve.*

Having ascertained this point, we must ascribe to this *one God* every excellence and perfection, which we discern in created beings, and separate from them, in our contemplation, every thing that implies any defect or limitation. When we conceive of God as wise, just, powerful, righteous, holy, and good; we must annex to each of these attributes the farther ideas of underived, immutable, infinite, and eternal. But here the human mind must be conscious to the feebleness of its own faculties. Here its highest and most enlarged conceptions must fail. *None by searching can find out God: none can find out the almighty unto perfection. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us. It is high, we cannot attain unto it.* The more, however, we accustom ourselves to meditations of this kind, and the more frequently we derive assistance from the magnificent and elevated descriptions, which are given of the Deity in the sacred writings, so much the more will our sentiments correspond to the greatness of his majesty and the excellence of his nature.

The relations, which God sustains to mankind, farther claim the devout acknowledgment

of the spiritual worshipper. As our Creator and Father, our preserver and benefactor, our moral sovereign, and final judge, we should present him to the view of our minds, and render him the homage that is his due. These sentiments concerning God will lead us to recognize our own dependance and obligation; humble us under a sense of our unworthiness, and dispose us to seek the favour of the infinite and eternal Jehovah.

I observe again, the spiritual worshipper will exercise the affections of the heart: he will love and fear God: he will be grateful in the remembrance of past benefits: he will confide in divine Providence for future good: he will cherish a humble, contented, and resigned temper in all the circumstances and amidst all the vicissitudes of life: and he will cultivate that benevolence of disposition, which shall induce him, like the object of his worship, to be kind and compassionate to all about him.

Moreover, those sentiments of the understanding and those affections of the heart, which we have now suggested, will produce corresponding effects on the outward conduct. He that worships God *in spirit*, though he does not neglect the outward forms and expressions of devotion, does not content himself with these: his mind ascends to God, when he has

no opportunity for bending the knee or clothing his thoughts in words. He mingles pious meditations and devout ejaculations with the occupations and even with the pleasures of life. In social intercourse as well as in private retirement; in the public scene, as well as in the sequestered and solitary retreat, he communes with God, supplicates his favour, and commits himself to his care and blessing. Nay, the course of his habitual conduct, under the restraint and influence of religious principles, is devoted to God. It is directed and regulated by the fear of offending him. It is guided and animated by the hope of his favour. Submission to his authority, obedience to his laws, imitation of his moral excellencies, resignation to his will, and a solicitude to promote his honour by the increasing influence of piety and virtue, are expressions of the homage which the spiritual worshipper renders unto God; and they are no less acceptable than that worship, which is accompanied with the outward forms, and which dictates itself in the explicit language, of devotion. Every act of piety, every exercise of virtue, every effort of benevolence, originating in just views of God, and animated by suitable affections, are, in reality, the fruits and evidences of those sentiments and dispositions, which constitute the essence, se-

cure the benefits, and produce the effects of that spiritual worship which our Saviour recommends. By such fruits and evidences of genuine devotion the spiritual worshipper will be known and distinguished amongst the multitude of those, who content themselves with the form of godliness without its power.

Once more—

This kind of worship, proceeding from sentiments of the understanding and affections of the heart, and producing the effects which we have now described, will be accompanied with a satisfaction and delight, which no mere mechanical services of a religious nature can ensure to those who perform them. Without the concurrence of the understanding and the heart, we can derive little pleasure and no permanent advantage from external worship: but when the powers of the mind are engaged, and devotion influences the habitual conduct; we shall recur to every religious exercise with satisfaction and complacency; we shall review it with delight; and the consciousness of its effects will inspire us with a hope in God and futurity, which shall be our solace and joy in every changing scene of our earthly pilgrimage.

Another property of the worship, which our

Saviour recommends, is *truth*. This term, in its reference to the rites and forms of the Jewish dispensation, may denote, that Christian worship is not like that of the Jews, which derived its obligation from arbitrary and positive appointment, but intrinsically fit and reasonable; suited to the perfections of God and the nature of man; conformable to the relation that subsists between them; and conducive to the improvement and happiness of intelligent, moral, and accountable beings. The ceremonies and sacrifices of the Jewish worship were ordained for special purposes; for the use of a single nation; and for a limited period of time. Although they were adapted to the design for which they were instituted, and those on whom they were enjoined were bound to observe them in obedience to the authority by which they were appointed; they were, for the most part, such as had no self-evident fitness and propriety: they were such, the obligation and utility of which the human understanding could not, by the exercise of its own powers, have discovered. They were approved and practised on the mere ground of the authoritative precepts by which they were ordained. Whereas the worship, which Christianity enjoins, approves itself to the under-

standing and heart, in right exercise, as soon as it is proposed. The sentiments and affections, from which it proceeds, are fit and reasonable, antecedently to every positive command. The effects it produces are pleasing and beneficial in their own nature; and this worship derives its obligation from its perceived and acknowledged suitableness to the attributes, character, and relations of its object, and to the faculties, state, and expectations of those, who are required to perform it.

Outward forms and ceremonies, which depend upon mere will and law, are either wholly abrogated or left indifferent. Nothing is authoritatively enjoined, which is not reasonable in itself, and by its own natural obligation and influence conducive to the moral improvement and true happiness of mankind. To this kind of worship we may justly appropriate the denomination of *truth;* the distinguishing character of which is the conformity of principles, dispositions, and actions, to the nature of things, and the relations that subsist between God and man. The obligation of entertaining honourable sentiments of God; of cultivating devout affections; of expressing these sentiments and affections by acts of homage, and by an habitual course of imitation,

obedience, and resignation, is self-evident. We approve this kind of practice as soon as it is proposed. We reproach and condemn those who neglect it, by the spontaneous dictates of the mind; and the more we reflect, the more culpable and reproachful the omission of it appears. But as to the time, and place, and manner, in which our worship shall be performed; as to the forms and ceremonies that shall attend it; and as to other circumstances, on which men have too often laid an undue stress, and which, like the debate between the Jews and Samaritans, have unhappily occasioned needless separation and discord:—these are not authoritatively decided by the founder of our holy religion; but they are submitted to the choice of human discretion. With respect to these, *every man is to be fully persuaded in his own mind;* nor should any human interference incroach on the liberty, which the Gospel allows and sanctions, and bind the conscience, which the legislator of the Christian church has left free. Whether we shall worship God or not, is a question of a very different nature. Here reason and revelation interpose. Those who neglect it, whether they are examined and tried at the one tribunal or the other, are wholly without excuse: nor will the plea against religious

worship in general avail, which is founded on a dislike of particular forms and institutions of human device and imposition.

Farther—

Truth, in its relation to the Jewish rituals, denotes that the worship of Christians is that, which the ceremonies and sacrifices of the Mosaic law presignified, and which these were intended, by the counsel and order of Providence, to introduce and establish. The rites of the Jewish dispensation indicated certain principles and dispositions of the mind; and without a correspondence between the one and the other, the mere external observance was of little moral avail. It served, however, to give a distinct character and separate subsistence to the Jewish people. But these rites had a farther reference to the dispensation of Christianity. They were introductory to it. They prepared the world for receiving it. They were types or figures of those dispositions and duties, in the exercise of which the religion of the Gospel would principally consist. Christian worship is, in the principles and the performance of it, the end of the law. It is the substance of which legal ceremonies and sacrifices were the shadow. It is, in a word, the truth, which they prefigured; with a view to which they were ordained; from their sub-

serviency to which they derived their utility and value; and, therefore, when this worship was introduced and established, their obligation ceased, and the constitution on which they depended was abolished.

Moreover—

Truth, contrasted against error and falsehood, implies, that the worship which Christ inculcated was directed to its proper object, and conducted according to the principles and precepts of divine truth, in opposition to every species of idolatry and false worship. Although the Jews retained just notions concerning the object of worship, they frequently deviated into idolatrous practices in the performance of it. Their history, which it is now needless to recite, affords several instances of this kind. The Heathens were idolaters, both as to the object and the mode of their worship. Christianity guards against error in both these respects: it teaches us that *there is one God and one Mediator between God and man:* and that alone is true worship, which is conducted on the principles and agreeably to the directions, which the rule of our faith and practice prescribes.

I observe farther—

Truth, in opposition to a mere attachment to outward form and ceremony, denotes since-

rity. No devotion, that consists merely in the observance of external rites, and that is performed with selfish and interested views, can be either acceptable to God or profitable to man. The Scribes and Pharisees, and almost the whole body of the Jews, in the time of our Saviour's public ministry, were notorious for this kind of hypocrisy. They had much of the appearance of religion, but little of its reality. They were scrupulously attached to established forms, the ostentatious observance of which answered the purposes of pride, ambition, and avarice. But their principles were corrupt: their views were sinister and selfish; and whilst they bent their knees in the temple, and clamoured their prayers in the public ear, they secretly worshipped Mammon. In the election of our mode of worship, as well as in the actual exercise of it, we should guard against all sinister and worldly views.

He that worships God *in truth,* according to the meaning of the text, is of a very different description. His heart is right with God. He is solicitous to seek and secure his approbation: and if, at the same time, he obtains the praise of men, he is not so foolish and fastidious as to despise it.

Once more—

Truth, when applied to religious worship, denotes, that it is habitual and constant. It is the character of truth, that it is stable and permanent. It does not depend on any local circumstance or temporary consideration. It is universal, immutable, and everlasting. In this view of it, we may justly apply it to the worship which Christianity enjoins. The devotion of the Christians is not, like that of the Jews and Samaritans, restricted to one place, exclusively of all others; nor to a limited succession of ages, nor to ceremonies and forms, of mutable and transitory obligation. It is coeval with the existence of man, and with the duration of the world. The principles, affections, and practice, of which it consists, are invariable and perpetual. In all the circumstances, and in every successive period of our present being, they will maintain their importance, obligation, and use. It will be our wisdom and duty to regard them, wherever our lot is cast; amidst all the vicissitudes of our condition, and in every stage of our mortal existence. Nay, beyond the limits of the present transitory state, and through everlasting ages in another and nobler condition of being, the worship of God will be the employment and the felicity of those, who are now initiated

in the practice of it, and who, by habit and use, have acquired a taste for its duties and its pleasures.

Having explained the nature and properties of the worship, which the text enjoins, it remains that we briefly enforce it by an illustration of the principle on which it is founded. *God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

God is a spirit. The object of our worship is a spiritual Being; and, therefore, he is, in his own nature and perfections, infinitely and immutably excellent, and, of course, worthy to receive every possible tribute of esteem and veneration, of homage and obedience, of trust and resignation. The properties of matter and the attributes of spirit are essentially distinct: and though we are incapable of forming adequate ideas of the substance to which these several properties and attributes respectively belong; we cannot hesitate in pronouncing, that the latter is more excellent than the former. The imperfection of material beings is the object of sense and experience; and the transcendent superiority of those that are denominated spiritual may be inferred from their faculties and operations. The powers of the mind, as we may conclude from our own con-

sciousness, far exceed all the known properties of matter; and we observe, that these powers are as diversified and various as the subjects in which they exist. In the class of spiritual beings, there are, therefore, infinite gradations; from the lowest degree of intelligence and activity, to the highest and most perfect. Beyond and above the most elevated rank to which our contemplation can ascend, there is *one spirit*, which possesses the attributes belonging to its nature in the highest possible degree. God is this spirit, infinitely, and, therefore, incomprehensibly, perfect; and his being invisible and incomprehensible, furnishes one evidence of his transcendent excellence. He possesses those attributes; he sustains those relations to us, which claim our acknowledgment and worship. And the worship, which he claims, and to which he is entitled, must be that, which is most excellent in its kind. It must be that of the understanding and the heart. It must possess those properties, which can bear the test of inspection by an omnipresent and omniscient Being. It must produce those effects on the habitual temper and conduct, which a holy and righteous Being, the observer and the judge of mankind, can approve. In a word, those

who worship such a Being honourably and acceptably, must *worship him in spirit and in truth.*

The observance of outward forms and rites, in which the judgment and the heart had no concern, might suffice for the idolatrous worship of material or imaginary deities; for gods of human device and creation. Magnificent temples and costly oblations and external homage, and a round of mere mechanical services, might answer the purposes of a devotion, that was calculated to delude the vulgar, to awe the superstitious, and to assert and maintain secular influence and dominion. But in the worship of God, who is a spirit, pure and holy, righteous and benevolent, who has access to the mind of the worshipper, and who demands the homage of the heart and of the life;—all these circumstances, and a thousand more, that might be multiplied for the purpose of ostentation and parade, are of no value. Separate from; substituted for; and designed to supply the want of a pious, holy, and charitable temper and practice, they are abominations in the sight of God. The only worship, which such a Being can approve, and in the performance of which he can delight, is that which is rendered to him *in spirit and in truth.*

Farther—

God is a spirit; and, therefore, his presence, agency, and dominion, are unlimited. On this account, they who worship him *must worship him in spirit and in truth.* Many of the Jews and of the Samaritans, as well as the Heathens in general, conceived, that the acceptableness of their worship depended on the place, in which it was performed, and the ceremonies, that attended it: and, indeed, several of their religious rites could be practised only in the temples, that were appropriated to them: and hence they were led to imagine, that they could derive no benefit from prayers and services, that were not performed in particular places and with ceremonies of a peculiar description. The same deluding spirit has been transferred into the Christian church; and some have been so absurd as to imagine, that acceptable worship depends on the time, place, and manner in which it is performed; and on a certain set of established phrases in which it is expressed. But we are taught to form very different ideas of the object of our worship. *He dwelleth not in temples made with hands.* He does not confine his regards to one place or mode of worship, in exclusion of all others. "His temple is all space—His altar, earth,

sea, skies." The prayers and praises of the upright and devout heart ascend to his throne with acceptance, whencesoever they proceed;—from the splendid sanctuary, the sumptuous palace, or the meanest cottage. The disposition and character of the worshipper, and not his external condition or the forms and language in which he presents his devotion, are what he regards. *To this man will he look, and with him will he dwell,* for his consolation and succour in trouble, and for his relief and encouragement in every scene of trial and duty, who is humble and sincere; whose conduct and profession correspond; and who unites the *power* with the *form* of godliness. In all places; at all times: in every situation, prosperous or adverse, easy or afflictive, elevated or depressed; a worshipper of this description may have unrestrained access to the audience of the Almighty Sovereign; and he may expect suitable notice. On his providence he may cast his care. From his wisdom and power he may derive direction and support. To his will he may resign every interest. Under his counsel and agency, wheresoever and whensoever they are supplicated and confided in, he may assure himself, that *all things shall work together for his good.*

Finally—

God is a spirit: and, therefore, he is immutable and everlasting, and our worship should be performed *in spirit and in truth.* Our dependence and expectations, in the exercises of our devotion and in the practice of our religious duty, do not rest on such capricious deities as the Heathens worshipped, to whom their votaries ascribed weaknesses and passions similar to their own: nor is the object of our confidence and worship a mere arbitrary sovereign, as some have erroneously represented him, and a partial respecter of persons. If we sincerely endeavour to approve ourselves to him, he will pity and succour our infirmities, and overlook our failings; nor will he ever leave or forsake us. Circumstances may change. The powers of life may decay. Seasons of distress may occur. The last conflict of nature may approach. However, the God, in whom we confide, and to whom we have access, is unchangeably disposed and alike able to shield and succour us: nor shall we ever have occasion to lament, that we have reposed our trust in him in vain. But our interest in his favour; our expectations from his goodness; our hopes of his approbation, ascertained to us by the gospel and mediation of

his Son, do not terminate with this uncertain life.

> The God we worship now
> Will guide us, till we die,
> Will be our God, while here below,
> And ours above the sky. WATTS.

With improved faculties and dispositions; and with renewed occasions for gratitude and praise, shall we join the celestial inhabitants in their exercises and in their felicity. Our spirits shall associate with those of the *just made perfect;* and in the presence of the great Father of our spirits participate *fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore.*

When all those rites and forms, which are adapted to our corporeal nature and to a state of imperfection, shall cease; when we shall no more need their help, and when they will no longer exist, as occasions of separation and variance; we shall commence a nobler kind of worship: we shall pursue that worship, which is performed *in spirit and in truth.* This will not be found unsuitable to our future condition; and it will be a source of progressive and everlasting improvement and delight.

To this advanced state of our intellectual faculties, devout affections, and spiritual enjoyment, let us all diligently and zealously

aspire! Thankful for the prospect of it, which the Gospel affords us, may we receive this gospel with gratitude, and retain it with an enlightened faith and a virtuous constancy! Persuaded that our holiness and felicity depend in a great measure on exercise and habit, let us accustom ourselves to the duties of devotion and the practice of virtue; nor ever incur the blame attached to those, who *forsake the assembling of themselves together* for the worship of God! Well assured, that our attention to these duties shall not eventually be in vain, and that our period of trial and improvement is momentary and precarious, may we give diligence to acquire a meetness for future, distinguished, and eternal felicity and glory!

SERMON IV.

THE EVIDENCE OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST VINDICATED AND ILLUSTRATED.

ACTS, X. 40th *and* 41st *Verses.*

Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly: not to all the people, but unto witnesses, chosen before of God; even to us, who did eat and drink with him, after he rose from the dead.

THE resurrection of Christ is the most important fact, that is recorded in the annals of the world. The credibility of it is interesting in proportion to its importance; and every attempt to illustrate and vindicate its evidence ought to engage universal attention. Is Jesus Christ a divine Messenger and Saviour? Does he claim obedience and encourage hope by a divine authority? May we follow his instruc-

tions without fear of error? May we rely on his promises of present succour and a future immortality, without danger of being deceived and disappointed? These are questions of the greatest moment; and the decision of them is intimately connected with our conduct and our happiness. To the resurrection of Christ we must appeal for satisfactory evidence on this subject. By ascertaining this fact, we establish every claim which he assumes: we justify every hope, which he leads his faithful followers to entertain: and we are warranted in addressing every argument and motive, which his Gospel contains, to the serious consideration of mankind.

The evidence of this fact depends upon the testimony of those who record it; and the credibility of their testimony on their general disposition and character, and on a variety of concurring circumstances, which serve to confirm and strengthen it. There is one circumstance, however, which has not escaped the notice of those, who have endeavoured to invalidate this testimony. It has been said, that the witnesses of our Saviour's resurrection were persons selected from the number of his own disciples for this purpose; that they were, therefore, parties in their own cause; and that their evidence is liable to suspicion. Had he

appeared to the chief priests and rulers of the Jews, and they had testified to the reality of his resurrection, the fact would have been more credible, and their favourable report would have precluded many doubts and surmises that occur, in considering, that our assent to it depends upon the testimony of his friends.

Such is the objection, which we now propose to examine; and as we are persuaded, that it admits of a very satisfactory reply, and that, when duly investigated, it will serve, instead of weakening, to corroborate the evidence of our Saviour's resurrection, we have stated it in its full force; nor do we wish any circumstance that attends it to escape notice. The apostle Peter allows and asserts the fact; that *Jesus Christ, whom God raised up the third day,* conformably to his own prediction, appeared *not to all the people, but to witnesses, chosen before of God.* The persons, to whom these words particularly refer, were the twelve apostles. But those, who are acquainted with the Gospel history, will recollect, that our Saviour appeared, after his resurrection, on various occasions, to a great number of persons besides the apostles. They were not the only witnesses of the fact, nor were they particularly selected for this purpose. But, having seen

and conversed with Christ, during the interval that occurred between his death and ascension, and having received full conviction that he was actually risen; they were chosen and ordained, not to be witnesses of the resurrection, but to testify the fact to the world. Many others had seen Christ as well as themselves; and they were equally satisfied of the reality of his resurrection; but *they* were deputed, by a special selection and appointment, to publish this fact, and to bear their personal testimony to its truth.

The objection, therefore, so far as it supposes, that some few of our Saviour's confidential friends were the only witnesses of his resurrection, is founded on a misconception and misinterpretation of the declaration in the text. The apostles were not chosen to be witnesses of the fact; but they were appointed to their office, and commissioned to publish it to the world, because, having seen Christ after his resurrection, they were duly qualified for the service assigned them, and were able to testify the truth of it from their own knowledge. Although our Saviour did not think proper to appear to the people at large; that is, to the multitude of the Jews, who were the declared enemies of his person and religion, and particularly to the chief priests and ma-

gistrates, who had been the instruments of his crucifixion; he *shewed himself openly*, without reserve and disguise, to those who had been accustomed to associate with him; and to no fewer than five hundred such persons at one time; and of the number of these were the twelve apostles, who were specially appointed to preach his doctrine, and to declare the fact of his resurrection, as a distinguishing evidence of its truth and importance. Their office commenced during the period of his public ministry; and one necessary qualification for the future exercise of it was their being able to attest his resurrection. Others might have borne a similar testimony. They were prepared and disposed to do it. But the apostles were particularly selected and ordained for this purpose.

The wisdom of this appointment, as far as it concerns the evidence of our Saviour's resurrection, and the great purposes of his mission, is the principal point to which our attention should be directed on this subject; but it is not the only one. It is a very natural inquiry, why the Jews in general, and the priests and rulers in particular, should not have had an opportunity of seeing Christ after his resurrection, and conversing with him, and ascertaining the reality of the fact? As this was the

evidence of his divine mission and character, to which he had often appealed; should not those, who persisted in their incredulity, notwithstanding the proofs of supernatural powers, which he had exhibited in the course of his life and ministry, have enjoyed the benefit of it? And if it had been sufficient to overcome their obstinate prejudices; would not their testimony have contributed, more effectually than any other concurring circumstance, to the conviction of mankind in general, and to the credit and influence of Christianity? This kind of reasoning, we allow, seems, on a slight and superficial consideration of it, to be very plausible; and it has been strongly urged and very pertinaciously maintained by sceptics and infidels.

Let us examine the principles upon which it is founded; and we shall perceive, that it is more plausible than just, and that it will not warrant the conclusion that has been drawn from it. It supposes, that the Jewish priests and magistrates had a right to expect personal evidence of our Saviour's resurrection; that some useful and important end would have been answered by its being afforded them; and that no injury to the character and religion of Christ could have resulted from their being thus indulged and gratified. If neither of these sup-

positions can be reasonably admitted; if, upon farther investigation, they should appear to be fallacious and unfounded; it cannot be alleged against the evidence of our Saviour's resurrection, that it was defective and partial, because it was not communicated to the Jewish priests and rulers.

The plea of right cannot be urged in their favour by any, who duly consider, what their disposition and conduct had been during our Saviour's life and ministry. Men, who had discovered no inclination to examine the nature of his doctrine and the design of his mission; who had slighted and resisted the means of information and conviction, which his preaching and miracles had afforded them; and who had pursued him with malignity and violence to the cross and grave;—such men could surely have no just claims on his farther attention: they could have no reason to expect, that he would condescend to use any new efforts for removing their prejudices, when every past endeavour had not only proved fruitless, but had served to exasperate their resentment, and to provoke a persecution which terminated in his death. Their opposition to him had been such, both in its nature and degree, as to render them altogether unworthy of any forbearance and indulgence. Much less discernment than he pos-

sessed would have been sufficient for perceiving, that no evidence was likely to avail with persons of their temper and character. They had justly forfeited every token of his regard. They had merited the most signal punishment. It would have been not only a vain, but an impious and daring presumption in them to expect any other evidence of his restoration to life besides that, which they might derive from the testimony of persons less guilty and more deserving than themselves. Besides, our Saviour's particular commission to the Jews expired with his death; and he had previously informed them, that they should not see him till they were better disposed to receive him. Every personal claim must, in this case, be set aside.

The plea of right being dismissed as unfounded, the next question that occurs is, whether any important and valuable purpose to themselves or others, would have been answered by our Saviour's appearance to them, after his resurrection? Have we any reason to imagine, that they would have been convinced of the truth of his mission and doctrine by such an appearance? The same prejudices and interests that prevented the effect of the miracles, which he had performed, and of which they had been witnesses, would have

resisted the conviction, which his resurrection tended to produce. The same antipathy to the doctrine he taught and the religion he meant to establish, would have prevailed against the evidence of this fact; and it is probable, that they would have only aggravated their guilt and condemnation by obstinately persisting in their unbelief.

But though they were convinced of the reality of our Saviour's resurrection, would they avow their conviction? Would they publicly testify the truth of that fact? By an undisguised and open declaration of it, would they lead others to believe and acknowledge it? This, indeed, would have been a very signal triumph of truth over prejudice and malice. But it would have been a triumph over their own prejudice and malice, of so extraordinary a kind, that it was very unlikely to happen. Pride and interest would have been very reluctant in acknowledging, that they had persecuted and murdered a divine Messenger; in renouncing the worldly rank and influence which they possessed; and in submitting to be taught and governed by the authority of Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had despised, calumniated, and crucified. If they were constrained to assent to the truth of our Saviour's resurrection, it was not very pro-

bable that they would confess to the world, that he, whom they had persecuted during his life, and doomed to a premature and ignominious death, was the promised Messiah and Saviour. It was not very probable, that in so doing they would publish their own disgrace, and that they would proclaim to the world, that they were persecutors and murderers. It would have required a degree of virtuous fortitude, of which we discover no traces in the Jewish Sanhedrim, to bear public testimony to the resurrection of a person, whom they had so lately condemned and crucified as a malefactor. Without such a testimony, of what avail would have been the conviction of their own minds to the general credit of the Christian cause? Afraid or ashamed of avowing it, and thus of forfeiting the reputation and influence annexed to their character and office, and of incurring popular censure and reproach; no benefit could have accrued from it either to their contemporaries or to future generations. They were, therefore, very unfit to be witnesses of a fact, which it was their interest to conceal, and which they were not likely to acknowledge, if they had believed it to be true.

Besides, their testimony, if truth had extorted it from them, and if they had possessed

honesty and resolution sufficient to avow it, would have been liable to suspicion. It was the testimony of men, whose minds must have been oppressed and terrified by a consciousness of their guilt; and it might have been said, that they were haunted by ghosts and spectres, and that their imagination converted a phantom into the real person of him, whom they had exposed to public derision, and sentenced to an ignominious death. Their testimony would have gained little credit with men of their own rank and station, and of principles and character similar to their own. It would have died with themselves; and produced no effect beyond the circle of their own acquaintance and the age in which they lived.

It ought to be considered farther, that the character and religion of Christ might have been very materially injured by his appearance to the Jewish priests and rulers, after his resurrection. They had no right to expect this kind of evidence. No good purpose could have been answered by it. I now observe, that it might have been very detrimental in its effects. If they had remained unconvinced, which might most probably have been the case, the fact would have been questioned. The multitude would have become obstinate and ir-

reclaimable in their incredulity; and they would have pleaded the authority of their superiors in station and office, as an apology for neglecting inquiry and rejecting the means of conviction. If they had been convinced, without honesty and resolution to declare the truth, the fact would still have been considered as doubtful, or at least of no great importance. But if with their conviction they connected the public avowal of its truth, our Saviour would have incurred the charge of an impostor, and his religion of fraud. Loud would have been the clamour of a combination between him and the rulers of the state. Suspicion would have attached itself to the evidence of men, who had the care of his sepulchre, who appointed the guard, and sealed the stone that secured it, and who could easily have propagated a report, which would have gained credit with the servile multitude. Christianity would have been represented, by persons who are prone to ascribe all religion to state policy, as a contrivance of the priests and magistrates of Judea, to answer some purpose of worldly emolument or ambition. Its progress and prevalence would have been attributed to the secular influence of its advocates; and it would have been deprived of that most

distinguishing and satisfactory evidence which it now possesses, that it derived its origin from God, and owed its success to the signal interposition of divine power.

Let any impartial inquirer pursue the hints that have now been suggested, and he will be constrained to own that our Saviour had very sufficient reasons for not appearing to the people and their rulers; to persons, who had no claim on this evidence of his resurrection; who were not likely to derive any benefit from it; and who were the most unfit to vindicate it from suspicion, and to certify it to the satisfaction of others, in a manner that would have reflected credit on the Christian cause. Had we no better testimony of the truth of this fact than that of the Jewish priests and rulers, we might well have hesitated in admitting it. Our faith must have been feeble and wavering, and liable to many invincible doubts and objections.

We shall next proceed to examine, as briefly as possible, the credibility of those who were appointed to be the witnesses of our Saviour's resurrection; and to shew that, even in a matter of such importance, we may venture to rely upon their testimony; and that it is the most satisfactory and least liable to any just objection, that could have been afforded us.

For this purpose, we may observe, "that they were capable of knowing the fact, and that they had sufficient opportunity for ascertaining its reality." They were the friends and companions of Christ, during his life and ministry. They had lived, for a considerable time, in habits of intimate acquaintance and of free intercourse with him. They knew his person. They were able to recognize him whenever he appeared. His corporeal form, his aspect, his voice, and every circumstance that could lead them to distinguish and identify him, were familiar to them; and therefore, after his resurrection, they were the most proper judges, whether the same being who was crucified and buried was actually restored to life. Every trace of the Master, whom they loved and honoured, and with whom they had associated, with little interruption, for about three years, was deeply impressed on their senses and on their hearts; and an absence of three days could not have effaced the image of him from their memory. As they were competent to ascertain the reality of his resurrection, they had every opportunity and every advantage for this purpose, which the most incredulous could have desired. He appeared to them on various occasions, during the forty days that elapsed be-

tween his resurrection and ascension. He ate and drank and conversed with them in the most free and familiar manner; and directed their attention to subjects, which must have been recent in their recollection, and which revived the remembrance of the discourses he had delivered, during his public ministry. He removed every doubt and scruple which they entertained concerning his restoration to life; and afforded them the most complete satisfaction, by an unreserved and undisguised intercourse with them, that he was actually risen; that the same body which was crucified and laid in the grave, was reanimated,—and that he had recovered all those faculties and powers, which he had exercised, previously to his crucifixion. Of the fact of his resurrection they had, therefore, sufficient evidence; and they were the most proper persons to testify it to the world.

Should it be alleged, that though our Saviour did afford to some of his followers an opportunity of obtaining the conviction of their senses, that he was actually risen, he refused it to others, and particularly to Mary Magdalene, who was the first person to whom he appeared: I reply, that although this has been admitted as a fact by some of the ablest

advocates of Christianity; yet the acknowledgment of it depends on a mistranslation and misconception of a particular text, in which it seems to be recorded. When Jesus discovered himself to Mary, he said to her, as our version has it, *Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father:* whereas it should have been, "Hold or detain me not, for I am not yet ascending unto my Father;" but *go*, that is, immediately, and without delay, *to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend,* that is, I shall soon ascend, *unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.* By this small verbal alteration, an obscure passage becomes intelligible, and the objection that is grounded upon it, is removed.

I add farther. "The witnesses of our Saviour's resurrection were men, not only capable of knowing the truth and duly informed concerning it, but on account of their general character, unlikely to report and propagate a falsehood. They had been raised from private and obscure stations to the office they sustained. They were destitute of those natural talents and external advantages, which suggest and favour a plan of imposture and deceit. Artless and undesigning, and unconnected with persons of extended views and worldly influence, they

were unfit instruments for concerting and executing a deliberate and complicated scheme of delusion. The principles they had embraced, and the profession they had assumed, since their conversion to Christianity, were altogether incompatible with a combination to promote the prevalence of a known falsehood. Integrity and a regard to truth, under the awe of the God of truth and justice, and in the prospect of righteous judgment and retribution, were the avowed principles of their conduct; and they must have been impostors, chargeable with the most atrocious guilt and the most consummate folly, if they had proposed, by the wickedness of deceit, to promote the cause of truth and virtue. But the falsehood of asserting, that Christ was risen, was such as would never have engaged their concurrence and support. It was an event of which they had no expectation. Their prejudices and false hopes had led them to surrender their cause, as altogether defeated, when their Master submitted to death. They had either forgotten or misunderstood his predictions; and when some of them first received the report of his resurrection, they were departing from Jerusalem with dejected and despairing spirits; and they needed very peculiar evidence of the

fact, before they were disposed to admit the reality of it. If Christ had not actually risen from the dead, these men would have returned to their former attachments and occupations. All their prepossessions in favour of the perpetuity of the law of Moses would have revived. Disappointed in their erroneous expectations, they would have been the less inclined to propagate an imposture.

More especially when we consider, that all their interests, as well as their prejudices, militated against their public declaration of a fact, which had never existed. Can we suppose, that they would have incurred the resentment of the whole body of the Jews; and that they would have hazarded their lives in the support of a cause, the founder of which had deceived and betrayed them? On the contrary, we discern in the temper and conduct of the witnesses of our Lord's resurrection undeniable evidence of their conviction of its truth and of their sincerity in avowing and publishing it. Nothing less than the evidence of truth can account for the change which they manifested both in their sentiments and conduct. Men, who a little while before were timid and despairing, become bold and fearless; declare the fact on the scene, where they report it to

have happened, and in the presence of those, who, after having succeeded in procuring the crucifixion of Christ, employed all the means in their power for preventing any delusion with regard to his resurrection; and who expose themselves to persecution and death in asserting and proclaiming it. With new views, with respect to the nature and extent of the Christian dispensation; with a knowledge and zeal, with a steadiness and constancy, which indicate a consciousness of truth and an extraordinary illumination; they publish the fact and propagate the doctrines and duties, which it was designed to establish and enforce.

Besides, "the Apostles wrought miracles in confirmation of the truth of their testimony." The God of truth concurred with them, and attested their credibility; and thus obviated every doubt and difficulty, which prejudice and malignity might have suggested. Every miracle they performed was a new attestation to the fact, which they reported; and the extraordinary powers they possessed, and which they derived from the Sovereign of nature, qualified them for being proper witnesses of it to the world. He, who appointed them to this office, aided them in the execution of it. Their success, insufficient as they

were of themselves to combat the prejudices and powers of the world, afforded an increasing and permanent evidence of the fact, on which their commission was founded. To us their testimony has descended with every sanction and with every circumstance of credibility, that can justify our assent, and our attachment to the doctrine they taught and to the practice of the duties they inculcated.

In the prevalence and duration of Christianity, and in the prospect of its continued subsistence and increasing spread and triumph, we discern traces of its divine original: we see existing proof of the resurrection of its founder; and we perceive reasons and motives for holding fast the profession of our faith in it without wavering. Our religion is founded on evidence, that cannot be reasonably questioned: the objections to which it is liable, furnish, on due examination, arguments in its favour. It needs only an impartial scrutiny and trial, in order to approve itself *the wisdom and the power of God.*

Against its adversaries let us be armed by a rational conviction of its truth. As we have means and opportunity, let us be prepared to *give every one a reason of the hope that is in us.* Nor let us imagine, that difficulties, which, at

first view, may startle and perplex us, are not capable, when properly investigated, of a satisfactory solution. Christianity furnishes us with principles and prospects, which, as we value our honour and interest, we should not hastily surrender; which we should be anxious to retain and cultivate. It is so congenial to the exigencies and infirmities, the doubts and fears, the wishes and hopes, of our nature and state, that we cannot renounce our faith in it, nor abandon the profession of it, nor be regardless of the temper and practice, which it enjoins, without real detriment and danger; without offending against our interest and honour; without incurring blame and meriting condemnation.

Availing ourselves of the instructions and precepts, by which it informs our understandings and regulates our conduct, and adhering to the visible profession of it in an age of general indifference and neglect; we shall be entitled to its consolations in many circumstances of unavoidable trial: we shall be animated by its hopes, when other resources of comfort and other grounds of confidence fail us. Have we been trained up in the knowledge and profession of it? Have we been accustomed from youth to maturer or declining

years to respect and observe its sacred institutions and laws? Do we cherish the desire and purpose of persisting in an attachment to our holy religion, as the directory of our conduct and the charter of our privileges and hopes? We have great reason for gratitude to the providence and grace of God. Let us extend its empire and promote its influence among those with whom we are connected; and testify our respect for its salutary doctrines and promises, by imparting the benefit of them to all, for whose present and everlasting welfare we are concerned. We cannot transmit to future generations a more valuable inheritance than the light and truth and grace of the Gospel of the Redeemer: nor can there be a worse symptom of degeneracy and of danger, than the neglect and disparagement of that divine revelation, which, with an authority superior to every other, inculcates lessons of virtue, and which, by a power peculiar to itself, cheers the heart of man in the conflicts of life and in the hour of dissolution. May it be the solicitude of every one who hears me to partake of the benefits, which Christianity imparts;—benefits, which the more he enjoys, the more he will value, and the excellence of which,

the longer he lives, the more he will be able to attest; and may we all be finally united in the participation of that immortality and glory, to which it conducts its faithful votaries!

SERMON V.

THE PRACTICAL INFLUENCE OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

JOHN, xiv. 19.

Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more: but ye see me: BECAUSE I LIVE, YE SHALL LIVE ALSO.

TRUE greatness of mind appears most to advantage in scenes of distress. Whilst the timid and dastardly despond under suffering, and tremble in the prospect of imminent danger, and their whole attention is occupied about their own ease and safety; the magnanimous maintain an even, tranquil temper, and seem to be less affected by the adverse occurrences that befal or threaten themselves than those whose concern in such occurrences is more casual or more remote.

These observations were never more signally verified than by the temper and conduct of our blessed Lord in the last scenes of his life;—scenes, equally interesting and instructive, and which no man can contemplate without admiration and profit. To survey the accumulated evils that awaited him at one view, without betraying any symptom of anxiety or timidity, required a strength of mind more than human. The prospect of being betrayed by one of the small band of his chosen companions, of being denied by another, of being deserted by all; of being apprehended, condemned, insulted, and crucified, by his implacable enemies, as a seditious impostor; of the despondency which his sufferings and death would occasion among his followers, and of the triumph which they would afford to his adversaries:—this prospect, no part of which lay hid from his all-comprehending view, was sufficient to deject and terrify every spirit but his own; and independently of that divine light and influence which he possessed without measure, it must have interested his whole attention and rendered him incapable of any thought or exertion for the benefit of others. But so singular and unparalleled was the magnanimity which he discovered, that he seems to disregard every thing that pertained immediately to himself.

His personal distress and danger were, in his estimation, objects of no importance, compared with the success of his cause and the encouragement of his associates and disciples. It was, indeed, necessary to apprize them of the tragical scene, through which he was soon to pass. This he does in the most gentle manner, partly as a warning to them, and partly as an evidence of the prophetic spirit with which he was endowed; but he neither dwells on the detail of his own sufferings, nor minutely recounts the many circumstances of aggravation that would attend them. He contents himself with informing them, that the period of the termination of his ministry and life drew near; and that his separation from them by an act of treachery and violence was an event soon to happen; and he thus cautions them against that surprise and terror, which an unexpected stroke of this kind might otherwise occasion. At first they inclined to discredit the intimations he gave them of his approaching death; but when they could no longer doubt or disbelieve, they were, as we may naturally conceive, exceedingly dejected and sorrowful. Many circumstances must occur to their minds, that served to alarm and distress them. Their affection for Christ, a master whom they both loved and honoured; their attachment to his

cause, and wishes for its prosperity and spread; and their concern for their own safety, must suggest a variety of painful apprehensions to their minds in the prospect of his untimely and ignominious death. In these circumstances of distress, they greatly needed succour and consolation; but they found in him a friend more solicitous for dispersing their fears and encouraging their hopes, than attentive to his own situation, however afflicted and alarming. In him were united the tenderest sympathy and compassion with the most heroic fortitude; a heart that felt for others with the noblest contempt of personal danger. Besides, he well knew, that the success of his cause depended, under Providence, on the constancy and zeal of his friends; and, therefore, he moderates their grief and terror in the prospect of his departure from them, by the most explicit assurances, that his connection with them and concern for them would not terminate with his life; that his capacity of directing them in their difficulties, and supporting them under their troubles, would be renewed and continued after his resurrection from the grave; that by the assistance and success which he would afford them they would have reason to be satisfied of his care both of them and of their cause; and that activity and perseverance on their part would

ultimately issue in the recompence of a glorious and happy immortality.

Of this kind is the declaration of the text, introduced by an intimation of his death and resurrection:—*Because I live, ye shall live also.* "My return to life you, my companions and apostles, may consider as an earnest of your success; as an evidence that you shall prosper in prosecuting the great object of your commission; as a security of your attaining those important and valuable ends of life which I have set before you; and as a pledge of your own resurrection and immortality."

Thus comprehensive in its meaning, and encouraging in its design, is the assurance of the text; implying not only their triumph over death, and felicity in a future world, but the resolution and activity with which, in consequence of the resurrection of their Master, they would be enabled to propagate his religion, and serve the best interests of mankind, and the glorious success that would crown their patience and labour. It is as if he had said—"My death is no sufficient cause of dejection and despair: my departure from you will be only for a season: in a little while ye shall see me again, restored to life, and invested with universal dominion; nor will you have merely the evidence of your own senses

that I am actually risen, a triumphant conqueror and sovereign; but you will have a witness in yourselves, in your courage, constancy, and zeal, and in the astonishing efficacy of your ministry, that *he who was dead is alive, and liveth for evermore.*"

Can any one impartially consider the surprising change that was produced in the temper and conduct of our Lord's first disciples, without deriving from this circumstance alone, independently of every other, a very strong presumptive proof, that he was really raised from the dead, at the time and in the manner which he had predicted? Is there any principle in human nature, is there any event in the history of human conduct, that can account for a change so sudden and so signal; without admitting the truth of our Lord's resurrection, and the extraordinary powers which he thus acquired? Before his death, notwithstanding all the lessons of encouragement and consolation which they had received, behold them timid, dejected, and desponding! When he was apprehended and condemned, and led out to be crucified, behold them dissembling or denying, or afraid of avowing their connection with him! And when they found that he gave up the ghost, behold their society dissolved; and see them retiring from the scene of

their disappointed expectations in despair and grief! But in a few days, these same persons rally and reunite, and seem to be divested of all their former passions and feelings. We no longer see them shrink from danger, and tremble through fear; solicitous to conceal their relation to Christ, or shamefully disowning it. In the Synagogues, and before the Sanhedrim, we discover no traces of what they so lately were: the timid and desponding appear resolute, courageous, and active; they despise danger, and defy death; and in the most undisguised and public manner venture to avow their character as the disciples and ministers of Christ; to preach his doctrine with an undaunted fortitude; and to charge the Jews with injustice and cruelty in procuring his death. Shall we endeavour to explore the cause of this wonderful change in the disgrace and crucifixion of their Master? Was it the awful event they dreaded; the event that dispirited and dispersed them, and the very prospect of which they were not able to bear; the event in which his enemies triumphed, and which they considered as the boundary of all their hopes:—could it be this event that served to re-animate their drooping spirits; to rouze their fortitude and activity, and to engage them in an united, firm, zealous, and success-

ful attachment to his cause? *They* must be weak and credulous to a degree scarcely conceivable, who can suppose that an intrepidity and zeal like those of the Apostles and first Christians, could be produced and maintained merely by the disgrace and death of their Master.

Nothing could have united them: nothing could have inspired them with the resolution and intrepidity, which they so signally manifested: nothing could have supported their patience, encouraged their perseverance, and secured their success, but the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and those powers which he imparted to them as an evidence and confirmation of the truth of this fact. *Because he lived, they lived also.* Conscious of his restoration to life; deriving supernatural influence from him, and animated by the hope of finally sharing with him in his triumph over death and the grave, the fearful became valiant, the weak became strong, and the gospel approved itself *the power of God to the salvation of them who believed.*

Having considered the words of the text in their immediate relation to our Lord's Apostles and first disciples, and having shewn, how the promise they contain was accomplished in their temper and conduct, and how the accomplish-

ment of the promise ascertains the fact on which it rests and to which it refers; we shall now proceed to apply them to Christians in general, and inquire what encouragement they may derive from the resurrection of Christ to persevere in the profession and practice of religion: in other words, what moral and practical influence our Lord's restoration to life ought to have on the character of his followers. In the prosecution of this inquiry, we shall perceive, how the comprehensive promise of the text is verified in their case; *because I live, ye shall live also.* To this purpose we may observe—

1st, That our Lord's resurrection affords unquestionable evidence, that his authority is divine, and that his doctrine is true; by a regard to which we are required to regulate our temper and practice. Our blessed Lord appeared in the world under the character of a divine teacher and law-giver. The great, the avowed end of his mission was to instruct men in their duty; to engage them to the performance of it; and to guide them in the way of happiness. If he deserves the character which he claims, the principles and rules of conduct which he inculcates are of unspeakable importance; they demand universal attention and observance. The authority that enforces them

is that of our supreme Sovereign and Judge. If we thus regard them, we cannot allow ourselves habitually to counteract them; and the more this conviction prevails, the more likely will it be to influence our conduct. Temptations and difficulties of various kinds will beset us. We shall need the aid of every motive, which duty and interest can suggest, to enable us to overcome them. Now, what motive is more important in itself, or better calculated to impress and influence every considerate and ingenuous mind, than that suggested by the unquestionable truth of the principles of religion and by the divine authority of its precepts and laws? If we had any reason to entertain doubts concerning the obligation of virtue and piety; if the advantages connected with a religious temper and conduct were matters of mere speculation and conjecture; if we had any ground for questioning, whether God will distinguish between the righteous and wicked, approve and reward the former, and regard the latter as the objects of his displeasure:—in such a state of hesitation and uncertainty, we might be at a loss how to act on a variety of occasions; we might find it difficult to *deny ourselves* and to *take up our cross* in compliance with the dictates and demands of religion; we might object against *laying aside*

every weight and even *the sin that most easily besets us*, and *running with patience the race that is set before us;* we might be tempted to desist from well-doing, and surrender our integrity amid the trials and difficulties which assaulted us. But when we behold the path of duty pointed out to us, as it were, by the finger of God; when his voice calls to us, "This is the way, walk therein;" when he assures us, by a special messenger, deputed from himself, speaking to us in his name and by his authority, that virtue and piety are the appointed and the only means of securing his love and favour, and of making us happy both here and hereafter:—each of us must fall prostrate before him, and say, "*Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth;* thy will enforces every precept and every prohibition with sanctions, which I cannot contemn; it has an energy in moving every spring of inclination and action within me, which I cannot resist; it inspires me with an alacrity and zeal to run in the way of thy commandments, to keep thy precepts diligently, and to persevere in my obedience to the end of life."

That the Gospel contains declarations and assurances of this kind; in other words, that, with regard to the principles of our faith and the rules of our conduct, it is a revela-

tion from God; we are constrained to believe by the resurrection of its Author. This fact of itself, and much more in concurrence with a thousand other testimonies, ascertains the truth and divine authority of every instruction and precept he delivered; and, therefore, *because he lives, we shall live also.* Our faith in him, settled on this basis, acquires a vital energy; it becomes a principle of uniform and persevering obedience, or of a holy and divine life, powerful in its efficacy and permanent in its duration.

Farther, 2dly, Our Lord's restoration to life assures his faithful followers of all needful assistance and support, in every duty and in every trial: and in this important sense, it is true, that *because he lives, they shall live also;* that is, they shall be directed and enabled to cultivate those virtues and graces, in the exercise of which the true dignity and happiness of life consist; the purposes of life are answered with respect to an intelligent, moral, and accountable being; and its perfection and immortality finally secured.

To such a life, though it be the proper life of man, most reasonable and honourable, most useful and happy, animal nature and the ordinary course of the world will raise a formidable opposition; an opposition which none,

in the most advanced stage of this life, can altogether escape, and which none, in any stage of it, can easily overcome. Thus exposed, however exemplary our own vigilance, resolution, and zeal, we shall need the protection and succour of a power, mightier than our own. It will be no inconsiderable encouragement to our own fortitude and activity to reflect, that the sovereign of nature is our friend and helper; and we shall engage in the warfare with vigour and success, while God preserves and aids us.

From the resurrection of Christ we derive the most animating hopes of divine patronage and assistance. He has thus assured us of the truth of those promises on which our expectations are founded; and he has thus evinced his power of imparting the succour which we need and seek. As the whole history of his life and labours, uniformly devoted to our welfare, forbids our entertaining a suspicion of his *inclination,* his resurrection and consequent dominion banish every doubt of his *ability,* to defend and support us in seasons of the greatest trial and danger. Our virtue and happiness are entrusted to his care; the preservation and advancement of them form part of the *joy that was set before him,* and of the recompence conferred upon him for his services and sufferings on our behalf; and we

may hence infer that he will never leave us unprotected and unsupported. As it was the great end of his undertaking to conduct us by a course of holy obedience to immortality and glory, we may rely on his faithfulness and goodness: he will not withhold those supplies of wisdom and strength which our proneness to err and the power of temptation may require.

3dly, Our Lord's victory over death and release from the grave afford a visible evidence and pledge of the ultimate triumph of virtue and piety; and thus incite and animate us to persevere in our religious profession and practice.

No situation in which we may be placed can ever be so distressed; no prospects so alarming; no external appearances so gloomy and discouraging, as those of our blessed Lord, when he pronounced the declaration of the text. But his views penetrated through the thick cloud that enveloped him. He knew that the malice of his enemies was subject to a sovereign controul, and their triumph momentary; that death could not dissolve his interest in the favour of God, nor the grave exclude the interposition of divine power for his rescue; and in the full confidence, that the almighty friend of integrity and virtue would not leave his soul in the mansions of the dead nor suffer his holy

one to see corruption, he anticipates his own resurrection as a security and pledge of the prosperity and triumph of all the believing and obedient. Under the administration of a being, who has signally testified his love of virtue and piety by defeating the utmost exertion of human malignity, and by a display of power in the resurrection of our Saviour, which must convince the most incredulous, that no efforts of human device and cruelty can prevail against his counsel, and that his dominion has no bounds:—under the administration of such a being, we may be assured that *it shall be well with the righteous. Who can harm us, if we be followers of that which is good?* Death and the grave can set no limits to the power, that is engaged on behalf of the pious and upright. Persuaded, therefore, that there is a reward for the righteous; that nothing can arise to disappoint their expectations and to obstruct their attainment of it, unless they are themselves negligent and careless; should we not be *diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord?* Should we not be *stedfast and unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord?* Should we not *hold fast the profession of our faith,* and pursue a course of holy obedience without wavering, and persevere unto the end? Our pattern and forerunner in the Christian race

invites and animates us, by his triumph over death and the distinguished testimony of the divine approbation, which was thus conferred upon him, to be faithful, firm, and active. *Because he lives,* we shall in no wise lose our reward ; *we shall live also.*

4thly, By our blessed Lord's restoration to life, in connection with the nature and design of his death, the fears inseparable from a frail, imperfect virtue and piety are removed; and sincerity is encouraged to expect acceptance.

Christ died for our offences and rose again for our justification. His death was a sacrifice of propitiation for the sins of men. Under the government of a holy and righteous being, jealous of the honour of his law, and invariably disposed to testify his abhorrence of sin by some awful token of his displeasure against it, even while he cancelled the guilt of the transgressor, the death of Christ was the appointed condition of conferring pardon on the penitent: it was a solemn ratification, on the part of God, of the promise and grant of everlasting life and blessedness, on the terms of a sincere, though mixed and imperfect obedience. The resurrection of Christ was a visible testimony, that his death was available to the benevolent purpose, for which it was ordained; and that the Supreme Sovereign, who, for wise ends in his

administration, appointed this method of dispensing pardon and happiness to the penitent and upright, approved and confirmed it.

This event, then, by dissipating the fears and encouraging the hopes of persons, conscious of their demerit and imperfection, affords a very powerful inducement to activity and zeal in well doing. So far from having a tendency to relax the resolution of upright and ingenuous minds; to render them careless and slothful; and to make them contented with partial and low attainments in virtue and piety; the assurance, derived from the death and subsequent resurrection of Christ, that God is not strict to mark the iniquity of the penitent, and that he will accept the sincere, notwithstanding their infirmities and failings, is an incentive to emulation, diligence, and constancy, in the practice and profession of religion, which none but obdurate transgressors can resist.

Finally, Our Saviour's release from the grave, and restoration to life, as the earnest and assurance of our resurrection and immortality, supply us with a motive to be active, exemplary and persevering in a course of religion and virtue, which cannot fail to influence all who duly consider it.

Because I live, says our blessed Lord to all his true disciples, *ye shall live also.* Having

fulfilled my will and followed my example, in your measure and degree, ye shall resemble me in my triumph over death. Your resurrection, at the appointed season, is as certain as mine; and the life to which you shall be raised shall, like mine, be incorruptible and eternal. With such an object of hope; with such a glorious recompence in prospect; who can renounce the profession? Who can be remiss and indolent in the practice of religion? They must be men of no ambition, of groveling views and bounded hopes, who can surrender the principles and desert the practice of religion, for any thing this world can offer or bestow. But why should I speak of deserting the profession and practice of religion? This is an ignominy, which none who hear me, can, I trust, be in any danger of incurring. Let us look forward, Sirs! a few years; and the world will be nothing to us; the places that now know us shall know us no more. Life, with all its busy cares and fascinating pleasures, will terminate. We shall be conveyed to the gloomy mansions of the universal victor. *Our fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live for ever? But let not our hearts be troubled, neither let us be afraid. All that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the son of man, and come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life. Because he lives,*

they shall live also. This is the ground of our triumph over death; hence we derive the chearing prospect of future immortality; and a more animating, joyful prospect the human mind cannot entertain. When our virtuous friends die around us; and when we ourselves are called to the last conflict; this is the only sufficient antidote to fear and grief. Having this prospect, then, *what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!* that when he *who is our life appears, we may also appear with him in glory.* Let me add, that as *the author of eternal life to all them who obey,* he merits every expression of our gratitude, love, and reverence: by commemorating his death, in conformity to his express command, we render him a tribute (how reasonable and becoming a tribute!) of affection and respect; and having honoured him upon earth, we shall be prepared to meet him, with confidence and joy, at that day, when he shall come to be *glorified in his saints and admired in all who believe.* Amen!

SERMON VI.

THE REASONABLENESS OF FAITH, AS A PRINCIPLE OF CONDUCT.

HEBREWS, xi. 1.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for;
THE EVIDENCE OF THINGS NOT SEEN.

IT is one of the first principles of wisdom, whatever be the plan of conduct we adopt and pursue, to satisfy ourselves, that we are right in our main end; or, that we seek a *real* and an *attainable* good. How many have *walked in a vain shew, and disquieted themselves in vain,* by forming visionary schemes of happiness; by placing it in objects inadequate to their expectation, or pursuing it by means ineffectual to their success! Hence have sprung those complaints that have reproached Provi-

dence and imbittered human life: *all is vanity and vexation of spirit.* Moreover, in proportion to the present self-denial and sacrifice, which the plan of conduct we pursue requires, so much the more solicitous should we be to ascertain success and advantage in the ultimate issue. Accordingly, those who professed religion in an age of persecution; who deemed not their property and their lives too dear to be surrendered for the sake of faith and a good conscience; were peculiarly obliged, both from principle and from prudence, to balance the advantages they thus secured, and the probability of attaining them, against the loss and injury they were likely to incur. Unless they could have given sufficient *reason of the hope that was in them*, they were acting a foolish and desperate part, and could be justified in their conduct, neither to themselves nor to the world, nor even in the sight of God. They could have no satisfaction in their own minds. They could expect no praise from others. Nor could they count on their own security in a season of trial.

The Sacred Writers, therefore, frequently lead the first converts to Christianity to consider and examine the grounds of their faith, as the most likely means of rendering them firm and fearless, active and persevering, in their Chris-

tian profession and practice. The great objects to which their views were directed, and under the influence of which they were required to regulate their temper and conduct, were invisible and future; and, therefore, the evidence they had of their reality and of their own concern with them, was different from that of sense and experience, which directed and determined their pursuit of present and temporal good. Nevertheless, it was abundantly sufficient to convince their judgment and to influence their practice. To this purpose, the Apostle asserts, in the text, that *faith*, considered as the principle of religion and virtue, is *the substance*, or confident expectation, *of things hoped for*, and *the evidence*, or conviction, *of things not seen.*

As it is the distinguishing character of Christians in every age of the world, that *they live by faith, and not by sight;* and as the chief efficacy of all the arguments and motives, that are addressed to men on the subject of religion, depends on the reasonableness and importance of this principle; it can never be unuseful to vindicate and recommend it. The more clearly and fully we are satisfied in our own minds concerning the evidence of faith, so much the more powerful will be its influence, and so much the greater will be our inducement to

go on our way rejoicing. With this view, we may observe—

1st, That faith is attended with all the evidence of which the objects to which it refers are capable; and that they admit of no other evidence, is a proof of their excellence, and exposes the unreasonableness of those who are dissatisfied with it. A man, who believed only the report of his own senses, would be justly deemed captious and very absurdly incredulous. He who expected the same kind of evidence for every kind of truth, would be universally reproached; and thought to be more scrupulous than wise. The testimony of others is, in many cases, as reasonable a ground of assent as that of our own senses; and, indeed, to this we are indebted for the greatest part of the knowledge we possess. There are many facts in history, reported by credible witnesses and transmitted to us by faithful records, concerning which we can no more doubt or dispute, than we can hesitate to admit those that fall under our own personal observation. It can, therefore, be no reasonable objection against the principles of religion, that they are founded on a regard to invisible objects; for *things that are not seen* may be accompanied with an evidence, which no wise man should scruple

to admit. *No man hath seen God at any time;* and yet he *has never left himself without witness* in any nation or age of the world. His works testify his existence. His perfections are displayed in the things that are made. His providence may be inferred from an attentive survey of the course of nature. Derivation and dependence are characters legibly impressed on every object we behold. The *fool* only can say, so much as *in his heart, there is no God.* What he is, indeed, we cannot adequately conceive; but whilst we discern order, and beauty, and good in the creation, we ascribe, without hesitation, to the Creator and first Cause of all, infinite wisdom, power and benevolence.

If we more particularly advert to the constitution of man, and contemplate his nature and state; we shall discover traces by which he is distinguished above all other creatures, and which plainly indicate his being designed for a nobler and more durable existence. In his capacities and desires we find him connected with another state, to which the present is only introductory and preparatory. *That* state is the object of his continual anticipation; and his hopes or fears are ever directing his views towards it.

Our faith in God and futurity appears, therefore, to be founded on an evidence, which is

obvious to all, and which none can reasonably dispute. But to the testimony of nature God has been pleased to superadd that of revelation; confirming the evidence afforded by the dictates of nature and the dispensations of providence, concerning his own moral character and government and the final state of mankind. It is no inconsiderable presumption in favour of the declarations and discoveries of the divine word, that they establish the conclusions suggested by reason and conscience, and by just reflection on the works and ways of God. Nor is it at all unlikely, that the Deity should communicate instruction to his creatures, with regard to their duty and happiness, by extraordinary messengers commissioned for this purpose: and if *his* character and *our* circumstances give us reason to expect it, we may naturally infer that, in the course of past ages, he has actually done it. If, then, God has thought proper, *at sundry times, and in divers manners, to speak unto the fathers by the prophets, and to us in later days by his Son;* can any one presume to say, that a Being, to whose controul all nature is subject, can be at a loss in furnishing messengers, appointed by himself, with credentials sufficient to justify their commission? Accordingly, the gift of prophecy and the power of working miracles afford an

evidence in support of divine revelation, which establishes its credibility, and constrains us to receive it with reverence and gratitude. Our faith in *things unseen* is, therefore, founded on divine testimony. A Being, who is immutable in his nature, and whose dominion is unlimited and everlasting, has enforced the principles and motives, on which religion is founded, by his own authority; and though the objects and events, to which they refer, are invisible and future, we have the highest possible evidence of their reality and certainty.

The hopes and fears, which faith suggests, are not imaginary and delusive. They depend on the declaration of God himself, who is incapable of deceiving his creatures, and who is infinitely able to accomplish the promises or to execute the threatenings, which are recorded in his word. Although the evidence, to which religion appeals, be different in kind from that of sense and experience, it amounts to the highest degree of assurance, which any testimony can afford;—the testimony of the omniscient and unchangeable Jehovah, or that of persons, whose instructions were delivered under a divine inspiration and commission.

Besides, because the objects and concerns, which are certified by the evidence of testimony, are not ascertained to us by sense and

experience, we may reasonably presume, that they are more excellent in their nature and more extensive in their duration than any other. The report of our senses relates merely to objects, that are present and material. The evidence of experience reaches but a little way, and comprehends but a very limited sphere of knowledge and truth. Whereas the evidence, on which religion is founded, informs us of objects, which the organs of sense are incapable of discerning; which are too excellent or too remote for their discovery and investigation: and it brings into present view those future scenes and more durable interests of our being, of which no experience of mortal life can enable us to form any just and satisfactory apprehension. That the objects and interests, to which faith directs our regard, are unseen, is, therefore, a consideration, which, independently of every other, ought to enhance our sense of their value and importance: and as long as we have all that evidence concerning them, which their nature and the circumstances attending them admit, we have all that can be reasonably expected.

Farther—

2dly, The *evidence of things not seen*, on which our faith is founded, is, in its nature and degree, suitable to our state of trial and disci-

pline. An evidence, absolutely irresistible, which would preclude inquiry, and dissipate every doubt, belongs to a higher condition of being than that, which we are now appointed to occupy. It is the privilege of superior orders of intelligence. It pertains to a state of maturity and perfection, towards which, indeed, we are tending, and which, unless it be our own fault, we shall ultimately attain. It is the proper and the promised recompence of the upright and pious; at a period, when, in the advancement of their faculties and of their virtues, every thing that is imperfect shall be done away. Knowledge, goodness, and happiness, are, in their nature, and by a divine constitution, gradual and progressive. As well might a child, whose mental powers are beginning to open on a boundless scene of inquiry, expect at once to acquire those enlarged views of truth and nature, which distinguished a Locke or Newton, as that man, in the present state of education and discipline for immortality, should have the same conviction of spiritual objects and divine truth with that of the *spirits of the just made perfect.* Shall men, who acknowledge their fallibility and imperfection in other instances, forget that they are men in the province of religion; and reject an evidence, adapted to their state, because it does

not obviate every doubt, and by its overpowering lustre and influence, silence every cavil?

More especially, when it is considered, that religious faith furnishes a proper exercise to our piety and virtue; acquires moral worth from the nature of the evidence on which it is founded and the dispositions that accompany it; and renders our obedience peculiarly honourable, acceptable, and praise-worthy! Were the objects of faith obvious to sense; were all men admitted to be personal witnesses of those scenes of their future existence, that are now concealed from their view by the veil of mortality; all would become alike believers through mere necessity. There would be no occasion for humble, upright, diligent, and patient inquiry. Every kind of distinction between the dissipated and thoughtless on the one hand, and the serious and attentive on the other, would be at once annulled; and the virtuous and pious temper and character would have no opportunity for cultivation and improvement, nor for suitable exercise and display. In a word, if the principles and motives of religion were accompanied with an evidence, which none, however heedless and prejudiced, could doubt or dispute, it would be inconsistent with the present state of man, as the infancy of his

being, and as a scene of trial for judgment and retribution.

3dly, The *evidence of things not seen* is such, in kind and in degree, as men are satisfied with in their ordinary transactions and concerns: nay, it is superior to that, which determines their conduct in a variety of cases, that continually occur. He who rejects that kind of evidence, on which our faith in things unseen and future is founded, I mean, the evidence of credible testimony and of a probability amounting even to assurance, virtually annuls every bond of mutual confidence, and counteracts the uniform tenour of the universal practice of mankind. The ordinary occupations of life are conducted under the influence of faith. This principle is the spring and cement of every social connection, domestic and civil. Without faith, social life would be a scene of suspicion and jealousy. All the foundations of mutual dependence would be destroyed. Every nerve of industry and activity, even in our secular pursuits, would become lax and feeble. Emulation would have no object: skill and labour could have no reward.

Whatever be our age, or station, or course of life, we literally live by faith. We are ever pursuing some unseen and future good; and often on a very slender probability and pre-

sumption of attaining it. In how many instances do men daily risk their property, and even their lives, on a more precarious ground of success and safety, than that upon which they are required to seek and secure their everlasting interest! Nevertheless, believing that the event will be favourable, none can reproach their prudence. They expose themselves to present inconvenience and danger, presuming that the issue will be prosperous, though their faith in the success of their adventure by no means excludes the possibility of a disappointment. To this purpose, Archbishop Tillotson, an excellent prelate of a former age, observes, "that men venture their whole estates to places, which they never saw; and that there are such places, they have only the concurrent testimony of men: nay, perhaps, have only spoken with them that have spoken with those that have been there. No merchant ever insisted upon the evidence of a miracle to be wrought, to satisfy him that there were such countries as the East and West Indies, before he would venture to trade thither. And yet *this* assurance God has been pleased to give the world of a state beyond the grave, and of a blessed immortality in another life."

4thly, The *evidence of things unseen* is abundantly sufficient to influence our conduct, if

we consider the importance of these things, either in their own nature or in their duration. In the prospect of obtaining a very great good or avoiding a very great evil, a slight probability of success will justify every possible exercise of zeal and diligence. The chance of succeeding, when the object in pursuit is of very considerable value, furnishes a sufficient motive to induce the most wise and wary to be active and persevering. The excellence of the end is an ample indemnity against the hazard annexed to the attainment of it: and in the common concerns of life men daily act under the influence of this kind of wisdom. They consent to run great risks in the prospect of averting some very threatening evil, or of obtaining some very valuable good. Would to God they would apply the same rule of prudence to their spiritual and everlasting interests! The happiness of heaven, which is the promised recompence of their virtue and piety, is infinitely excellent in its nature and eternal in its duration. The distress and misery, in which vice and profaneness ultimately issue, are the most dreadful evils, which the human imagination can conceive.

Were the evidence of their reality much more obscure and doubtful than it is; were our success in escaping the one and obtaining the

other much less certain than it is; were there only a mere probability of our being happy or miserable in a future state of retribution;—we could not hesitate for a moment what course to pursue. Every principle; every exercise of worldly prudence must reproach and condemn those, who are inattentive and careless, whilst the soul that never dies, and an awful eternity, are depending. Admit only, that *the evidence of things unseen;* of a moral administration, a righteous judgment, and a state of retribution, amounts to a probability: allow only, that man *may* be accountable, and that his future condition *may* depend on his present conduct; that the good and pious *may be* happy for ever, and that the wicked and impenitent *may be* doomed to future distress and misery: and who can presume to dispute the possibility or even the probability, that this may be the case, and that the account which the Scripture gives us of the final destination of the good and wicked *may not* be true?—the consequence is undeniable, that *the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom* and *to depart from evil understanding.* In a case, where the loss is great and the damage irreparable, and where the happiness in prospect is infinite and everlasting; a much less degree of evidence than that which recommends to our regard the principles and motives of religion

should be thought sufficient to determine our purpose and to influence our conduct. No man of common prudence, that wishes to maintain an uniform and consistent character in this respect; let his doubts and difficulties be ever so many; can think religion unworthy of his attention and practice. No man, who thinks at all, can allow himself to live and die in the total neglect of it, without self-reproach and terror. More especially when it is considered,

5thly, That, although *the evidence of things unseen* and future should be altogether groundless and delusive, we are, upon the whole, gainers by our faith in this life, and can be no losers or sufferers in the final issue. Faith in God and futurity is a principle of very beneficial influence on the present character and state of mankind. Even in those cases, where its influence is partial and feeble, and where it is most counteracted by opposing passions and temptations, it prevents those excesses of profligacy and impiety, which are equally injurious to individuals and to society: and we have reason to be thankful for the salutary restraints, which faith supplies. In many instances, however, its empire and influence are more extensive. It not only preserves men from doing themselves harm by the practice of iniquity; but it is of

admirable use in regulating their temper and conduct; and by aiding and promoting their virtue and piety, it lays the only solid foundation of personal, domestic, and social tranquillity and enjoyment. Those, who believe and consider, that they are under the constant notice of an invisible observer; and that they are accountable for their conduct at the tribunal of an omniscient and righteous judge; those, who have in habitual view and expectation the happiness prepared for the upright and obedient, and who are persuaded, that there *remain wrath, indignation and anguish for every* impenitent *worker of iniquity;* are possessed of a defence to their integrity and virtue, which no other considerations can furnish. Those, who believe and consider, that the witness and judge of their conduct is the sovereign of nature, and that his dominion is absolute, unlimited, and everlasting; and that this great and good Being is their friend and patron; that he will approve himself such in every present exigence and trial; and that he will hereafter rescue them from the grave and bestow upon them the recompence of everlasting life; possess within themselves a source of security and of triumph amid the changes of this life and in its closing conflict, which infidelity has never yet afforded to its most obdurate votaries. Contrast the

light and peace and hope, enjoyed by the true believer, against the perpetual gloom and occasional distraction and terror of the sceptic and infidel;—in his best state, doubting and suspicious, and in a period of distress and danger, joyless and trembling; and you will be disposed to retain your faith, though it should be a delusion. You cannot but wish to live and die, thus deceived; and be thankful, that death, which is the boundary of your existence, though you should then die to live no more, and sink into everlasting oblivion, is the only boundary of that imposture, that has been the source of so much happiness to you through all the changing scenes of your pilgrimage on earth, and that makes your last slumbers undisturbed and tranquil.

"Ye departed Saints! We, who still survive, regret your removal. But to you the grave is a peaceful habitation. Although deceived in your dearest hopes, you can feel no pangs of disappointment. No consciousness of the imposture, practised on you for your good, as long as any capacity of happiness remained, can now molest your quiet. Nor can the anguish we feel nor the tears we shed on your account penetrate the recesses of the tomb!"

The righteous, however, who have lived by faith, shall be had in long and grateful remembrance. Their virtues survive even death itself.

and shall be recorded for the instruction and the applause of succeeding generations.

From faith, therefore, in God and futurity, we derive very substantial benefit through life; and after death, if believers have nothing to hope, they have nothing to fear. That awful moment, which terminates their enjoyment, renders them for ever incapable of distress and anguish.

It is needless now to reverse the scene. If religion be our wisdom and interest, on the supposition that our existence terminates at death, and though there should be no moral government nor future state of retribution; none can surely resist the arguments in its favour, that are enforced by *the powers of the world to come.*

If the reasoning that has been pursued in this discourse justifies and recommends religion, it also exposes and condemns the folly of impiety and sin. With the evidence of things future and unseen, which nature and revelation furnish, the conduct of habitual and persevering transgressors is altogether without excuse. They are guilty of an imprudence, which, in their worldly concerns, would be universally reprobated, and which, in relation to their spiritual and eternal interests, amounts even to madness. Can no arguments teach them true

wisdom but those which sense and experience supply? But, alas! when these arguments present themselves, the wisdom they acquire can only enhance their despair and wretchedness. As we wish to avoid their guilt, and doom, and future distress, let us accustom ourselves to meditate, often and seriously, on the unseen realities of an eternal state, give influence to our faith by reflection, and bring into present view the interesting scenes of futurity. They are of infinite importance, though invisible; they are unquestionably certain, though future. In a little while, though apprehended to be at a distance, they will become the objects of sense and experience. To us may the nearer view and unveiled discovery of things that are now unseen be the occasion of everlasting triumph and joy!

SERMON VII.

THE REQUISITION AND COMMENDATION OF FAITH JUSTIFIED.

JOHN, vi. 29.

Jesus answered and said unto them, this is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

A VERY erroneous notion has prevailed amongst those, who have arrogated the honour of thinking freely on the subject of religion. Whilst they have very properly demurred against the interference of human authority in matters of judgment and conscience; they have been ready to conceive, that *God* has no right to command and controul the exercise of the understanding. Accordingly they allege, that faith, which is an assent of the mind to any declared truth or attested fact, is no fit

subject even of divine requisition; and since our believing with the understanding no more depends upon ourselves than our seeing objects with the bodily eye, faith cannot be justly prescribed as a duty. They add, that it entitles those who possess it to no praise, and that those who are destitute of it incur no reproach and blame. On this ground, they object to Christianity, because in the evangelical writings faith is enjoined and commended, and unbelief is prohibited and condemned. None, who are acquainted with these writings, will dispute the fact, nor need those, who are most anxious for maintaining the credibility, honour and influence of Christianity, hesitate in admitting it. Faith is unquestionably the subject of command in the New Testament. Our blessed Lord frequently enjoins it as a duty. He represents those who disregarded and disbelieved his divine mission and doctrine, as culpable and justly liable to condemnation.

It will not be unuseful to vindicate Christianity from the objection that has been founded on this circumstance; more especially, as we shall be led to suggest some practical reflections, that will be of general importance and utility.

It should be considered,

1st, That faith is required only on the part

of those, to whom the truths and evidences of Christianity are proposed. That persons, who possess the means of knowledge and conviction, should be expected to make a right use of them, is not unreasonable. It is natural to imagine, that those who communicated the doctrines and discoveries of Christianity to mankind considered them as important and useful; and, therefore, they would be justified in recommending them to attention, and in exhorting others to form the same sentiments of their evidence and credibility, of their importance and utility, which they themselves entertained. If, indeed, they had demanded faith without any previous instruction, and without accompanying the truths they delivered and which they required men to believe, with any attestation of their divine origin: if they had made those accountable for their unbelief, who never enjoyed the necessary means of conviction; there might have been some ground for the objection that has been already stated. But the persons of whom faith was required and whose incredulity was condemned, were the auditors of our Lord's discourses and the witnesses of his miracles. They had an opportunity of examining and judging for themselves; and they were justly reprehensible for not yielding their assent to the truth that was actually proposed and suffi-

ciently attested. In later times, those only are expected to believe the mission of Christ and the doctrines of his religion, to whom the Gospel has been communicated, and who possess the means of acquainting themselves with its evidence and its contents. None are accountable for the knowledge, which Christianity imparts, but those to whom it has been revealed. None are required to believe, who are destitute of this knowledge; nor are any accountable for their unbelief, who have never been favoured with the means of instruction and conviction.

The precepts that occur in the New Testament, respecting the necessity and obligation of faith in the Gospel and its divine author, concern only those, who have lived under the Christian dispensation; who have access to the light of revelation, and who enjoy sufficient opportunities for acquainting themselves with the doctrines, duties, and evidences of Christianity. As for others, who have never been thus favoured, their character and state will be determined by a different law; and they can have no reason to dread the scrutiny and judgment of that Being, who is the common parent of mankind and who is a righteous and impartial judge. But persons of the description beforementioned can have no reason to complain, that they are required to believe truths and facts,

which are proposed to them by a competent authority, and with sufficient attestations: more especially when we consider,

2dly, That the doctrines and discoveries of Christianity, to which they are expected to pay attention and to give assent, are in the highest degree important and interesting. The authority under which they are delivered, independently of every other circumstance that attends them, commands respect. They challenge a divine origin. They are communicated to mankind under this sanction. They consequently deserve examination, and if their pretensions be well founded, it cannot be of trivial moment, whether they are cordially received or contemptuously rejected.

Besides, they are, in their own nature, highly interesting to mankind. They furnish principles and rules of duty of the most important kind:—such as pertain to us as intelligent, moral, and accountable beings. They open to us views and prospects far beyond the limits of this mortal life. They administer encouragement and consolation to us in unavoidable scenes of distress and danger. They soothe and chear our spirits under a sense of guilt and weakness. By the promises of pardon and succour and a future immortality, which they impart, they contribute in no small degree to the tranquillity

of our minds in the present state of our being, and to the security of a permanent happiness in that which is future and eternal.

Faith in the Gospel is, therefore, no less a privilege than a duty. None who duly advert to their own character and state and final destination, and who consider how well adapted are the precepts and discoveries of Christianity to their direction and consolation; to their encouragement in the practice of their duty, and to the confirmation of the best hopes they can entertain; can otherwise than wish, that they may be as true as they are acceptable and interesting. They cannot but be disposed to receive them with a willing and cordial faith; and it would be strange, if they were indifferent and unanxious, whether they were sufficiently attested, and stranger still, if they hastily rejected them without attention and examination.

It is undoubtedly every man's interest to be a Christian, provided that his faith has a due influence on his conduct. The truths which the Gospel teaches and the expectations it leads us to entertain are consolatory and encouraging; and it must indicate perverseness and depravity, to seek for reasons in order to vindicate the disbelief of them. None can justly complain; none who are rightly disposed will complain;

—that they are required to give assent to doctrines and discoveries, so suitable to their circumstances; so animating to their minds in scenes of duty and of trial; and so conducive to their present and everlasting happiness, as those which Christianity communicates; unless the evidence that attests them be insufficient and unsatisfactory. And if this should be the case, they will surrender them with regret. They will lament, that the wishes and hopes they excite are unfounded; and that the encouragement and comfort they are likely to derive from them are imaginary and delusive. Such, I say, would be the reflections and feelings of a well-disposed mind, contemplating the truths which Christianity teaches and the prospects which it sets before us, if there were any reason to entertain doubts concerning them. These doubts would be distressing to such a mind. It would rejoice to find, that they admitted of a satisfactory solution, and that its faith was justified and established.

Thus it appears, that the importance and utility of the discoveries of Christianity recommend them to our acceptance: nor can we think it unreasonable, that we should be required to believe, on the authority that reveals them, truths which are so excellent in themselves, so suitable to our nature and state, and so salutary

and beneficial in their influence on our character and happiness. But the reasonableness of enjoining faith as a duty on those, to whom the Gospel is revealed, will farther appear, if we consider—

3dly, The evidence that attests it. Did the Author of our religion, or the writers of the New Testament, enjoin implicit faith—faith in doctrines and facts, which were either in themselves incredible or not confirmed by sufficient testimony; we might object both against the act of believing and the command that required it. We might say, that such a faith was absurd and irrational; and so far from being entitled to commendation, that it deserved reproach and censure. But to doctrines that approve themselves to the unprejudiced mind, as soon as they are proposed and understood, and that are accompanied with clear and convincing attestations of the divine authority, by which they are communicated, we cannot refuse our assent; we cannot think it unreasonable, that we should be expected to believe them. The doctrines of Christianity are of this kind. They claim the acquiescence of the judgment and of the heart; they are attested by proofs suited to their own nature and to the faculties of those to whom they are revealed.

The same authority that enjoins us to believe commands us also to examine; and at the same time affords us that variety of evidence, which is adapted to produce conviction. The declaration of the text, which enjoins faith in Christ as a duty, was preceded by a signal miracle, which no being could have performed without the immediate assistance of divine power, and which, therefore, furnished a satisfactory proof of divine interposition. Our Saviour might well require those whom he addresses to *believe on him whom God had sent;* when his commission was at the same instant ascertained by the manifestation of the power of God. And though we are not visible witnesses of the miraculous operations, that testified our Saviour's divine mission; we receive the records of them upon such testimony and in such a line of tradition, as would be sufficient in other cases to command our full assent. Nor are miracles the only evidence of the truth of Christianity, with which we are furnished. We cannot search the Scriptures and advert to the progress of events in the history of the world, without perceiving that many remarkable predictions have been fulfilled, both at the time of our Saviour's life and ministry, and in succeeding ages of the world.

He who commands us to believe, affords us evidence to justify our faith. He produces and exhibits his testimonials, whilst he requires our assent to the truths he reveals: and unless, after deliberate and unprejudiced examination, we can pronounce these to be either fallacious or insufficient, we ought not to demur against that exercise of faith, which he enjoins. We should consider that, if Christianity proceeds from God, he has adapted the evidence that recommends it to our faith, in its nature and degree, to the faculties of our minds; and we should not, therefore, hastily reject; we should, indeed, diligently examine, what claims this high original. This is an act of duty;—this is an expression of pious gratitude, which we should be inexcusable in omitting: for the neglect of it we are accountable; and we are culpable, on the principles of natural religion, whether revelation be true or not. This leads me to add—

4thly, That the dispositions, which precede and accompany faith in Christ and the Gospel render it a proper subject both of command and commendation. When men allege, in vindication of their scepticism or incredulity, on the subject of religion, that the assent of their judgment is not at their own disposal; and that faith depends altogether on evidence; this

plea is partly true and partly erroneous. But it is by no means applicable to the subject under consideration. Christian faith is an act of the will as well as of the understanding. It depends upon the state of the affections and passions, as well as upon the judgment; and it may be obstructed or promoted by a variety of circumstances, besides the simple evidence of truth. When we are commanded to believe, we are required to examine without prejudice; to be dispassionate, calm, and upright in our deliberations and inquiries; to set aside every consideration of sinister interest in our determination, and to follow the conviction of our minds in our purposes and in our practice.

Although the mere assent of the understanding to a proposition of a speculative nature may not be the proper subject of command, or of commendation and reward; yet such a faith as we have now described, which implies previous inquiry and subsequent conduct, may be very properly enjoined as a duty. Those who exercise it may be reasonably applauded. Those who are destitute of it may be justly blamed. When the evidence is perceived, and is fully sufficient, faith becomes a necessary act. But the mode in which we search for this evidence, the view with which we perceive it, the impression it makes upon our minds, and the con-

sequent conviction which it produces:—all these depend upon ourselves; the faith, which results from them, becomes a voluntary act, and may be prescribed by authority and commended as a virtue. Whilst one person may be incredulous, because he indulges passions and prejudices, that pervert and blind his judgment, and because it is his interest, when he reflects on his character and conduct, that Christian principles should be unfounded and fallacious; another person, who seeks truth without any previous bias; who wishes to be guided and comforted by the doctrines and hopes of Christianity; and who has nothing to fear, but every thing to expect, from a persuasion of its truth;—such a person will find reason for faith; ample, clear, convincing evidence; in that kind of testimony, which was objectionable, unsatisfactory, and inconclusive to the other. To the humble, and docile, and well disposed, it may be satisfactory and convincing; but conceit and an affectation of superior wisdom, self-sufficiency, and a desire of differing from the multitude, obstinacy in error or addictedness to licentious conduct, may bar up the avenues by which the light of truth enters into the mind, and prevent that conviction, which it would otherwise produce.

Christian faith is of a practical nature. Its

object is practical and not speculative truth; and, therefore, it is, in its nature and in the dispositions and resolutions, which it comprehends, a fit subject of precept and commendation. It is a duty, the performance of which may be as reasonably enjoined upon us as the practice of any other duty. More especially when we consider—

5thly, The effects of faith in Christ and the Gospel, both with regard to our conduct and our consolation and hope. This faith comprehends a variety of practical principles, which, duly cultivated and habitually regarded, would contribute to regulate the temper, to direct us in the course we ought to pursue, to restrain or to encourage us, as different circumstances occur, and to administer succour and comfort in our seasons of exigence and trial.

Those who admit the truth of the discoveries of revelation with regard to the providence of God, the mediation of the Redeemer, the pardon of sin, the grant of divine assistance, and a state of future immortality; are furnished with principles of conduct and of consolation, which the light of unassisted reason could never have afforded them; because, in fact, it does not afford them to those who never enjoyed it.

The command to believe in Christ and Christianity is, therefore, in effect, a command to imbibe and cherish those principles of holy obedience and of true happiness, which the Gospel imparts to those, who cordially receive it. It is a command to observe the instructions and rules of duty which our religion supplies; and to avail ourselves, in scenes of trial and difficulty, of the sources of encouragement and consolation, which it has provided for us. Can any one object to a requisition, so reasonable in itself and so beneficial in its consequences? Can any one, who has a just sense of his weakness and danger, of his sinfulness and demerit, of his accountableness to God, and of his destination for eternity, hesitate to comply with it? Can he reluctate in applying to those sources of information, comfort, and hope, which Christianity affords to mankind? or, if he has ever sought and secured to himself the benefit that may be derived from hence on many occasions and in many trying circumstances of life, can he scruple to acknowledge, that there is not any precept, which has a more comprehensive view to his true interest, and which more effectually conduces to promote it than that, which requires him to *believe on him whom God hath sent:* to direct his views to that divine Teacher and Saviour, with whom are the

words of pardon and assistance, of comfort and hope and eternal life?

He who has experienced the sacred powers of his Christian faith will gratefully and joyfully acknowledge, that the exercise of it is a duty in the requisition of which he not only acquiesces, but rejoices; that the exercise of it is a singular privilege to man in his present state of trial and mortality; and that he cannot less than anxiously wish that his faith may increase more and more, in both its sanctifying and solacing influence, and that he may derive a corresponding increase of benefit from it both in life and death.

This, says our Saviour, *is the work of God*, or the exercise which God requires, which he approves, and which he will finally honour and reward, *that ye believe on him, whom he has sent.*

Having shewn that faith in Christ is a fit subject of command, of honourable distinction, and of final recompence, because it is required only of those to whom the revelation of the Gospel is communicated; because the doctrines and discoveries of divine revelation are in the highest degree important and interesting; because the evidence that attests its divine origin is sufficient to excite and to justify conviction; because it is our obvious duty and true

interest to cultivate the dispositions that precede and accompany Christian faith; and because the effects it produces, with respect both to our conduct and comfort, are such as to evince the benevolence of the requisition that enjoins it:—nothing now remains but very briefly to apply the subject.

It is an obvious inference, from what has been said, that it is not a trivial, unimportant, and uninteresting matter, whether we are believers in Christianity or not. If the argument of this discourse be just, it is of great moment, that we believe, with the understanding and heart, and *make confession with the mouth unto salvation.* Faith in Christ, considering the circumstances in which we are placed, the advantages we enjoy, and the means of conviction, with which we are favoured, is a duty; which God reasonably requires, and to which we ought to pay a suitable regard. We cannot be excused, if this duty should engage but little of our practical attention. We incur guilt and blame, if we are unbelievers in consequence of corrupt prejudices and passions, of attachments and interests, that are the effects of vicious habits, unjustifiable connections, and sinister views and prospects. Our unbelief is culpable in itself; and it aggravates the guilt and will enhance the punishment of that mis-

conduct, which either originates from it, or is encouraged by it.

It should be considered, more especially by those who extol the religion of nature and disparage Christianity, that, besides instructions and motives, such as unaided reason never afforded to mankind, which the Gospel furnishes, it presents to us a person, a character, and an undertaking, which deserve and demand our peculiar attention and acknowledgment. Jesus Christ is entitled, by the eminence of his rank and his personal excellencies, to our veneration and esteem. His character ought to be contemplated, and cannot be duly contemplated without exciting our emulation and engaging our resemblance. His undertaking exhibits an object of trust and a source of consolation and hope, to which we cannot be indifferent, without injury to ourselves;—to our virtue and to our felicity. The new relations, which the Gospel creates and establishes, infer corresponding obligations. There are affections and duties that naturally flow from them; and they are such as cannot be neglected without guilt and without danger. Our blessed Lord challenges, by every just claim, our love and gratitude; our veneration and trust; our imitation and obedience. It may be reasonably expected, that we should reverence the Son of

God, bearing a commission from the Sovereign of the world, in which we are all peculiarly interested, and executing a trust of the highest importance to our acceptance and happiness. God forbid, then, that any of us should slight this heavenly Messenger! that we should disregard that Teacher and Saviour, who is *full of grace and truth!* and that we should ever think it of little moment, what sentiments we entertain concerning him and what dispositions we exercise towards him!

I observe farther—

This subject, pursued to the latitude of which it is capable, would furnish a caution against neglecting the culture of our minds, as well as the regulation of our conduct. Good principles are intimately connected with good practice. It is of no small importance, what we think, as well as how we act. We are accountable for our sentiments as well as for our conduct. Although we are not amenable to any human judge or earthly tribunal for the exercise of the understanding;—although the mind is a kind of empire to which no human jurisdiction can extend; we are, nevertheless, accountable to God for our thoughts as well as for our words and actions. They are equally open to his cognizance. They are equally liable to his scrutiny and judgment. They are subject

to his inspection and to his animadversion, with regard to the manner in which they are formed, and the effects which they produce on our hearts and lives. There is a licentious mode of thinking, as well as of acting, which is reproachful and culpable; and which will justly incur blame at a higher tribunal than that of mortal man.

Let none, then, imagine, that their minds are so far their own, as not to be accountable to God, the great Father of their spirits. Let none erroneously fancy, that they may think as they please, without being liable to reproach and censure from God, as well as injury to themselves. Let none neglect to cultivate those virtues, such as humility and meekness, and others which we cannot now mention, on which the proper exercise of the understanding depends; and let all avoid those prejudices and passions, which would mislead and pervert the judgment, and render the sentiments they adopt no less culpable in the sight of God than mischievous to themselves.

Moreover, let us suspect those principles, however they may be recommended to us by the confidence and zeal of those who avow and maintain them, which are connected with indifference and negligence, with respect to the habitual conduct. And much more let us avoid

those notions, which tend to promote, or which serve to justify a licentious practice. *By their fruits ye shall know them,* is a maxim, which, duly regarded, would preserve us from many errors of judgment, the consequences of which are permanently and extensively detrimental.

Finally, let us be ambitious of connecting religious principles with a virtuous practice; nor separate what God has joined together. Thus shall we approve ourselves, and be approved of God; and entertain good hopes in the prospect of that scrutiny and judgment, which will determine our everlasting state.

SERMON VIII.

THE EXCELLENCE AND UTILITY OF CHRISTIAN HOPE.

TITUS, ii. 13.

—*Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

THE excellence and value of Christianity appear in no instance more signal and illustrious than in its aptitude to the condition of mankind, as a state of discipline and trial; in the encouragement it affords to the practice of persevering virtue; and in the consolation it administers amidst the variable scenes and uncertain events of human life. From its tendency to confirm, augment, and perpetuate the happiness of those, who cordially embrace it, and who conform to its instructions and pre-

cepts, we deduce an argument to evince its divine original, and to recommend it to the acceptance and attachment of mankind, which no sophistry can invalidate, and which none, who value their own interest, can wish to oppose and refute. That it has this tendency is an unquestionable truth, and capable of the most convincing and compendious demonstration.

It will be readily allowed by those, who advert to the operation of the human passions, and to the actual experience of human life, that their happiness depends more upon hope than upon possession. This is owing, not so much to the attainment and fruition as to the expectation of any temporal good. When one object is gained, others present themselves to view; excite new desires; and furnish fresh incentives to activity. Thus enjoyment is rapidly succeeded by hope; and hope becomes the principal spring of our felicity. Without it, no good in real possession, however valued, and however ardently sought in distant prospect, would much or long avail to happiness. As this is the case, Christianity adapts itself to the constitution of the human mind, by exciting and encouraging hope; and by extending our views and prospects to distant objects and future events. By thus enlarging the sphere of our

connections and pursuits, and by giving us an interest in scenes of existence and enjoyment, invisible to the eye of sense, and far removed beyond the limits of mortality, hope contributes, in a very high degree, to our felicity. With peculiar propriety, then, does the Apostle annex the epithet of *blessed* to that hope of Christianity, which has for its objects the unseen and glorious realities of a future world; and well might he represent them in the text as *looking for*, or, as the word might be rendered, *gladly entertaining*, this hope.

What we farther propose, is to illustrate this distinguishing property of our Christian hope, or to shew in what respects it may be justly denominated *blessed;* and then to evince the wisdom and duty of our cultivating and cherishing it.

I observe—

1st, The hope of Christians will appear to deserve this appellation, if we consider it with regard to its origin. It is an affection of the human mind, which we derive from God, the maker of our frame, and which all the dispensations of his providence and grace conspire to cherish and promote. In this view, it is an indication of his benevolence; and as he is independently and immutably happy in himself, he thus manifests his disposition to extend

and augment the happiness of his rational offspring.

How limited must have been the sphere of our enjoyment! How few the sources of it! How contracted and precarious its duration! if our capacity of happiness had been restricted to the actual possession of any good. Our enjoyment must, in this case, have been similar to that of the brute creation; to which the power of fore-knowledge and anticipation seems to have been denied. Whereas we are endowed with the faculty of foreseeing, in some degree, future events, and of adding to present fruition the superior and more varied pleasures of hope and expectation. As God has implanted this principle in our mortal frame, with wise and benevolent design, he has afforded it scope for exercise by presenting to our view a variety of objects that are adapted for this purpose.

The hope of future being and felicity beyond the boundaries of sense and time yields one strong, presumptive evidence of their reality. Our Creator, who is infinitely benevolent and happy, would not have deluded us with prospects of this kind, if he had not provided for our enjoying what by the constitution of our nature he has led us to expect. Much less would he have encouraged an ideal and fal-

lacious hope by enabling us to infer from a survey of our present mixed and mutable condition, that this is not the whole or only scene of existence for which he has designed us.

The dispensations of his providence concur with the principles and powers of our own minds in extending our views to a state of more perfect and permanent enjoyment than this world affords. The hope, which natural reason suggests, and which is confirmed by just reflection on the vicissitudes of our present being and the seemingly partial and unequal distributions of providence, is farther established by the discoveries of divine revelation.

From these hints it sufficiently appears, that our hope of future existence and blessedness proceeds from God. It is a principle of divine extraction. We derive it from the maker of our frame and the sovereign ruler of the world: and we may deduce its excellence from its divine original. It is an honourable and happy distinction, which he has conferred upon our nature; and when we contemplate the source from which it springs, we cannot but conclude, that it was designed to multiply the means and to increase the amount of our felicity. Having reverted to the original, we shall,

2dly, Direct our attention to the object of

our Christian hope. This the apostle informs us is *the glorious appearing of the great God, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ.* Nothing can be more grand or more interesting than such an event. By visible displays of celestial glory will the appearance of Jesus Christ, as the judge of the world, be attended: and as he is deputed to this office by supreme authority; as he is qualified for it by a communication of divine powers; and as he executes it under the counsel and with the approbation of the great God and father of all; the season of it, and the solemnities that accompany it, are fitly denominated *the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

Behold then, with the eye of faith and by the aid of meditation, the dignity, which will then be conferred on him, who assumed the character and executed the office of the Saviour of mankind! —a dignity, derived from the special appointment and concurrence of the supreme and universal Sovereign; corresponding to the abasement of his condition, during his abode on earth, and the fit recompence of his services and sufferings for the glory of his father and the happiness of men! Behold the retinue of angels and glorified spirits, and the countless myriads of human beings, that will then surround the throne on which he is seated, and

that are prepared to approve and justify the decrees which he will pronounce! Behold the completion and triumph of his benevolent undertaking for the salvation of mankind; and *the great multitude, which no man can number,* that shall then appear to be partakers of its inestimable benefits! Recognize, with delight and rapture, in the happy number, many of your friends and kindred, of your fellow-worshippers and fellow Christians;—of those whom prejudice and erroneous judgment had deemed unworthy of this honour;—of your fellow-men of every nation and people and tongue; and anticipate the happiness of being yourselves of this distinguished number! You will then readily allow that the hope of such a glorious appearing is truly blessed. Happy will gratitude render you in the prospect of the signal honour conferred on him, who submitted to shame and pain and death, that he might become *the author of salvation to all them that obey!* Happy from principles of piety and benevolence in the expectation of being witnesses to the security and felicity of many who, like yourselves, were once sojourners in a state of trial and danger; and still more happy in the hope of being associates with such, far beyond the reach of danger, in employment and blessedness for ever!

Such are the outlines of the object of our

Christian hope. For just conceptions of it we must wait till our hope is accomplished in vision and enjoyment. No tongue can describe; no mind can adequately apprehend the glory and felicity which God hath prepared for the faithful and obedient; and which Jesus Christ, the delegated arbiter of their state, will assign to persons of this character. But imperfect as our knowledge is, it is amply sufficient to justify the epithet, by which our hope is discriminated in the text. The mind that can indulge such a hope without satisfaction and delight; that derives no accession of happiness from it, must be destitute of every principle of gratitude, of every sentiment of piety, of every affection of benevolence.

3dly, The hope to which the text refers is a blessed hope, if we consider it with regard to the evidence that attends it. If we had any reason to apprehend, that it is groundless and delusive, the pleasure it affords would be proportionably diminished. But it is so well founded and confirmed by such a variety of arguments and attestations, that we may indulge it without hesitation, and retain it without the slightest suspicion of disappointment. There is not a principle that has been more general in every age of time and that has been more prevalent amongst all the nations of the world,

whether they have been more cultivated or more barbarous, than the expectation of a future state of account and retribution. The awe or the hope of this state has been coeval with the existence of human beings. It seems to have been inseparable from the constitution of the human mind; and to have been one of the most natural and obvious deductions of human reason, contemplating its own powers or surveying the present condition of mankind. Many confused and absurd ideas, we are ready to allow, have been blended with this principle; and the suggestions of reason, either wholly unassisted or aided merely by the dim light of tradition, have been fluctuating and unsatisfactory. Whilst the principle has been admitted, as the spontaneous dictate of the human mind, men have sometimes reasoned themselves into doubt and incredulity. Hence it appears that a divine revelation was necessary and useful, in order to direct and help their inquiries; and to afford on a subject of such importance certainty and satisfaction. The last and most complete revelation of this kind was communicated to mankind by Jesus Christ. He *hath brought life and immortality to light.* He hath dissipated the clouds that overspread a future world, and established those hopes, that were apt to fluctuate and waver. To persons, who acknow-

ledge his divine origin and mission, the evidence of a future state is unquestionable. Whilst they believe the truth of his doctrine, they cannot hesitate in admitting this fundamental article of it; and every argument, that attests the former, and that serves to justify their faith in Christianity, establishes their hope of a future immortality.

With persons, who reject the authority of revelation, we should reason on different principles. We should recur to the conclusions that may be deduced from the faculties and condition of mankind, as well as from the moral perfections and government of God: and we should allege the testimony of such as never enjoyed the benefit of instructions, delivered by prophets and teachers, supernaturally commissioned and inspired. From these sources we should derive an accumulation of evidence, which is sufficient to overpower every scruple and objection.

But with those, who allow the divine mission of Christ, and who believe that he declared the counsels and purposes of Almighty God, we should appeal to his doctrine. We should cite his positive and repeated assurances, that death is abolished, and that the present life will be succeeded by another, that is unchanging and eternal. We should urge every attestation to his character and office, as a divine teacher

of truth and duty, as an argument in proof of future immortality. To such we should say, that no doctrine is so often inculcated, so amply confirmed, so powerfully enforced on the attention of mankind, as this:—and that, without renouncing their Christian faith, they cannot abandon the hope, which springs from it, and which is inseparably connected with it.

Upon the whole, whether we advert to the deductions of reason or to the declarations of the gospel; whether we regard the dictates of natural conscience or the assurances of revelation; whether we attend to the voice of God, speaking to us in our own frame and in the course of his providential government, or addressing us by Jesus Christ his Son; we cannot want evidence of that hope, which has for its object a future world of retribution. A hope, therefore, thus certified, thus satisfactory, thus animating, deserves to be called a *blessed* hope. But the appellation will appear to be still more appropriate and discriminating, if we consider it,

4thly, With regard to its influence, both on our conduct and our comfort.

What vigour of mind—what patience of labour—what activity of pursuit—what renewal and perseverance of efforts;—does hope produce in the ordinary concerns of human

life! Nevertheless, in many cases, probability of success is the only foundation on which it rests; nor have we any security against accident or adverse occurrences and ultimate disappointment. Not to add, that the object which excites and encourages hope is often of inconsiderable importance and value. What, then, may not Christians expect from the influence of hope on their religious temper and conduct? What caution and vigilance—what resolution and fortitude—what constancy and zeal—should it not be the means of producing in our practice and pursuits, as moral and accountable beings, as candidates for a glorious and happy immortality! In this course of expectation, conflict and labour, success is certain, and the object of attainment is everlasting felicity. The apostle well knew the efficacy of this principle; and he ascribes to it the most beneficial effects, when he says, that those, who *deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and who live soberly, righteously, and godlily in this evil world*, gladly entertained *the blessed hope of the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

With ingenuous minds; with those whose sensibility is most likely to be wrought upon by the most laudable motives, no affection of the human heart has a more powerful and permanent influence than that of hope. It

excites emulation. It is an incentive to activity. It animates perseverance. Its effects have been astonishing in scenes of severe trial and conflict. It has produced the most eminent and illustrious characters of fortitude and constancy, which history records. And in the common course of religious virtue, it is admirably adapted to preserve us from temptation and to render us irreproachable and exemplary in our general conduct. The hope of being approved and rewarded at the appearance of our final judge, and in the presence of the assembled universe, is sufficient to counteract the influence of every allurement and of every terror, which might otherwise seduce us from the path of duty, or deter us from pursuing it without wavering. It is sufficient to render us *stedfast and unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord;* whilst it assures us, that *our labour in the Lord shall not be in vain.*

Hope is not less beneficial, as a source of comfort, than as a principle of conduct. When the world frowns upon us, and personal or domestic affliction creates a gloom around us and depresses our spirits, hope penetrates the darkness that envelopes us, introduces gleams of light and consolation into our benighted souls; and by irradiating our minds, diffuses a mild and pleasing lustre about us. In other words, the

hope of relief and rescue is a cordial to the anxious, troubled, and desponding spirit. It elevates the depressed; fortifies the feeble; cheers the disconsolate; and animates those, who are almost despairing of redress and deliverance. It points out to them, at no great distance, an asylum; a place of refuge; a retreat from the storms and billows, that buffet them on the ocean of life: an unmolested haven of rest and security.

With this prospect, they encounter danger and distress with recruited vigour and firmness. They endure affliction with patience and resignation; they consent to suffer, with acquiescence and tranquillity, though their trials should be prolonged and varied; when they assuredly know, that their period of release approaches, and that they shall soon exchange sorrow and tribulation for joy and triumph. In a word, it is hope that gladdens the hearts of the prosperous; that sweetens enjoyment; and that enhances the value of the good in actual possession: whilst it alleviates distress, and imparts consolations, to which the dejected and despairing are utter strangers. It is not merely a distant rescue, which our Christian hope discovers to us; but present relief and succour:—the support of that power and the manifestations of that goodness which are en-

gaged in conducting and upholding us through the variable scenes of mortal life to the permanent bliss of immortality. Well, then, by an easy figure, which denominates the cause from the effect, may we describe as *blessed* that hope, which has so great an influence on our happiness, whatever may be our apprehensions or condition.

5thly, *Blessed* is our Christian hope in reference to its ultimate termination and accomplishment. The hope that centers in worldly good is often erroneous and deceitful. It overrates its value. It miscalculates its certainty. If we are prosperous in our pursuit, or if we are unsuccessful, we are equally disappointed. Our enjoyments seldom correspond to our expectations. Our expectations are often frustrated. But the hopes, with which Christianity inspires the believing and obedient, will be undoubtedly fulfilled. The accomplishment of them is certified by the truth and faithfulness; by the power and benevolence of the unchangeable and eternal God. And they have this peculiar and discriminating excellence, in which they surpass all the prospects of sense and time, that they terminate in a happiness, which will far exceed, in respect both of degree and duration, any previous estimate that could be formed of it. *Eye hath not seen, nor hath ear*

heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what God hath prepared for them that love him.' We know not at present; we are incapable of knowing; nor is it fit we should know, *what we shall be hereafter.* The object of our hope, if we could appreciate it according to its true excellence; and if we could entertain answerable expectations of it; would obscure the glory and deaden the attractions of the world. It would create dissatisfaction and disgust with its highest attainments and most valuable enjoyments. The season in which we are invested with the full and unalienable possession of it will be that of *the appearance of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.* The value of it will correspond to the time and manner in which it will be conferred; and to the various grand and interesting circumstances, that will attend the bestowment of it. *All that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the son of man, and come forth.* The living and the dead of every age and nation shall be convened into one assembly; and *every man shall receive according to his deeds.* Then shall the righteous be distinguished in this august and venerable assembly, by the applause of their Saviour and Judge; and their happiness, by his irreversible decree, be rendered unchangeable and everlasting.

Such is the termination of our Christian hope. Such are the ultimate issue and final accomplishment of our views and expectations. With such prospects, we may anticipate at present some portion of the happiness that awaits us in reversion.

What will not men do and suffer in the expectation of a distant good!—a good, partial in its nature and precarious in the event. How, then, should the sure and permanent felicity of a future world, not far remote, and into the possession of which we may soon be translated, contribute to alleviate every present trial, and to augment every present enjoyment?

Little need be said in order to prove, how much it is our wisdom and duty to cherish that *blessed hope*, which we have endeavoured to describe. Gladly should we entertain this well-founded and animating hope, as a preservative from the temptations of the world. If we duly appreciate the happiness, which is reserved for those, who *live soberly, righteously, and godlily* in this evil world: if we cherish the expectation of it; if we aspire to the ultimate possession of it; we cannot be easily corrupted and misled. We shall be provided with a counterbalance to the allurements of licentious pleasure; with an armour that will defend us from the assaults of the adversaries of our virtue;

and with powers for resisting their enticements and escaping their snares. Shall we forfeit the hope we entertain, for the sake of any unjust gain, for the sake of any worldly honour, for the sake of any criminal indulgence? Shall we exchange the prospect of everlasting blessedness for any honour, or pleasure, or interest, which the world can propose to us? or, can we think, that, by such a barter, we shall not incur remorse and self-reproach; and lay a foundation for distressing regret and lamentation in the progress and at the close of our years?

Farther, we should gladly entertain the hope of future felicity as an incentive to an active and persevering virtue. This principle will render us *diligent in business and fervent in spirit.* It will dispose us, not only to avoid evil, but to do all the good in our power; to exert our faculties; to improve our time and talents, and *to abound in all the works of the Lord:* that we may thus acquire eminence of character and attainments, and that we may ultimately obtain the full accomplishment of every expectation we indulge.

Moreover, as a source of relief and comfort in seasons of unavoidable distress, we should cherish the hope of future blessedness. Whilst we are clothed with mortal bodies, and dwell in a mutable world, it is vain to expect exemp-

tion from pain and sorrow. We should, therefore, provide ourselves with the only sovereign and effectual antidote to the evil we may dread or suffer. The hope of obtaining a speedy, complete, and everlasting triumph over sin and sickness; over calamity and distress; over every kind and degree of mental, bodily, and social affliction, is the only remedy that will avail in every successive period and in every changing scene of mortal life. This hope is connected with an approving conscience and an irreproachable conduct; and in this way, then, we should endeavour to acquire and preserve it.

More especially, we should gladly entertain this hope, as the only certain security against the distressing fear and awful consequences of dissolution. That we shall survive death; that we shall be rescued from the grave; and that we shall be happy in a future world, are the only reflections, that can soothe and calm the anxious spirit in the near approaches of a dying hour and of an eternal state. Let these reflections be familiar to our minds: let us recur to them amidst the decays of nature and under the apprehensions of danger; and they will blunt the sting of death, and render us tranquil and resigned in the last conflict.

Finally, we should gladly entertain the hope,

which the text recommends, as a defence against the scepticism and infidelity of the age in which we live, and as a means of firmly attaching us to the faith and profession of Christianity. Those who have this hope, in lively exercise, and who experience the benefits accruing from it, will not be much in danger of making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience; of abandoning those principles, and of deserting that practice, on which it is founded, and by which alone it can be justified and maintained. Whereas, if we are destitute of hope, we shall be glad to divest ourselves of fear; and having nothing to lose by the surrender of our religious principles, we shall be prone to seek an imaginary security from distressing alarm, by indulging prejudices against them, which may at length terminate in our utterly renouncing them. As the shield of our faith, let us cherish that *hope, which maketh not ashamed;* and in the persevering exercise of faith and hope, we shall be secure and happy in the hour of our dissolution and at the tribunal of our Judge.

SERMON IX.

MUTUAL LOVE, THE CHRISTIAN TEST.

JOHN, xiii. 35.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

IN every society it has been customary to distinguish the members of it by some badge or token, which should manifest their separation from others, and their mutual relation to one another. The inhabitants of every country have something that is discriminating in their laws, customs, and manners, as well as in their corporeal form and mental disposition. In subordinate communities of the same country, there are regulations and forms peculiar to themselves; and in all the various associations, either more enlarged or more limited, by which

men are united to one another, it is necessary to establish certain rules and orders, by a conformity to which their subsistence is preserved and their harmony promoted. Thus also, in all the schools of philosophy, of ancient and modern times, and amongst all the religious sects that have ever prevailed in the world, there is some distinguishing trait or character, which pertains to each, and by which they have been respectively known and acknowledged. Socrates and Plato, Aristotle and Pythagoras, Zeno and Epicurus, Confucius and Mahomet, and all the founders of various sects, political, philosophical, or religious, have been discriminated by tenets and practices appropriate to themselves; and they have imposed upon their adherents and disciples the belief of opinions and the observance of rites, by which they were to be separated both from one another and from the mass of mankind. Amongst the Jewish rabbies and teachers, the same custom prevailed; and they were ambitious to establish and maintain a visible distinction between their respective followers. This distinction, at and near the time of our Saviour's mission and ministry, consisted of observances intolerably austere or contemptibly frivolous. They were chiefly of an external and ritual nature; and their tendency was to divert their attention

from matters of intrinsic obligation and importance, and to alienate their affections from one another. Thus, the Jews and Samaritans laid a greater stress on the *place* of worship than on the *object* and *mode* of it; and differing about a circumstance of secondary and subordinate moment, they maintained no friendly intercourse with each other. The Pharisees, likewise, who were at this time the predominant sect in the Jewish nation, were scrupulously observant of those ceremonies, which their law enjoined, and which unscriptural tradition had multiplied, as tokens of distinction between them and the Gentile world. Of these they were rigidly tenacious; and they regarded with contempt, and even with abhorrence, persons, who had not the same views of their obligation, importance, and utility.

At such a season, and in such circumstances, it would be naturally expected, that our blessed Lord, who appeared in the world under the character of the teacher and founder of a new religion, differing, in many respects, from any that then prevailed, either among Jews or Gentiles, should establish some discriminating test, by which his disciples should be distinguished from the rest of mankind. What test or note of distinction could have been more liberal and comprehensive; better adapted to

the spirit of his doctrine and the ends of his undertaking; more likely to remove the prejudices and subdue the passions that created variance and discord; and more conducive to the union and harmony and general happiness, which he wished to promote; than that which he introduced and enjoined! It was not a new name, a speculative opinion, or an outward rite, which he adopted for this purpose. Tests of this kind had been long enforced by the pride of philosophy, by the zeal of party, by the policy of the crafty and designing, and by the influence of the powerful and ambitious; and he foresaw that, in future times, they would be revived with every sanction, which political wisdom could devise, and civil authority, aided by secular interest, enact. Convinced of the evil, which they had already produced, and anticipating, as it were, the mischief that would attend them in succeeding ages; the test which he establishes is of a very different nature, and it is such, which, if duly regarded, would supersede the necessity of any other; *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

Such is the appropriate and distinguishing character by which the founder of our religion is desirous, that his followers should be known; and if they have been deficient or faulty in

this respect, it is owing to the perversion of his doctrine, to the improper interference of worldly power, and to the imperfection of their nature and state. There was a time when Christians were thus actually known and distinguished. Tertullian, an ancient father of the church, informs us, that the Heathens testified to their honour: "Behold, how these Christians love one another!" Their charity extended, as Julian, the Roman emperor, who was an apostate and an enemy, acknowledges, even to their enemies.

What we farther propose, is, to illustrate the nature of this test; to shew how Christianity enforces it; and to point out its peculiar and distinguishing excellence. We shall then close with some suitable reflections.

The *first* property and evidence of mutual love is mutual forbearance. Connected as we are with one another, by our wants and weaknesses, as well as by the affections of our common nature, and subject to the influence of error and passion, occasions will perpetually recur for the exercise of reciprocal candour and toleration. We should, therefore, be ready to allow for the frailties and failings of others, with the hope that our own will meet with the same indulgent treatment. On conduct that is doubtful, we should

incline to put the most favourable construction. For the sudden sallies and expressions of resentment we should devise and admit an apology; and we should be ready to ascribe to mistake and misrepresentation, rather than to malignant and premeditated design, many of the provocations and offences that occur in the intercourse of social life. This kind of candour and forbearance would preserve our own minds calm and unruffled, prevent many occasions of discord, and be the means of soothing and subduing the angry passions of others, whilst it restrained and controuled our own.

Moreover,

As offences will unavoidably occur, notwithstanding every precaution, mutual love will dispose us to mutual forgiveness. So far from considering it as mean and dastardly to accept apologies from those, who have unintentionally or even designedly done us injury, we should think it honourable and generous, and an act of duty, to forgive those who have offended us; and to be as prompt and cordial in the exercise of forgiveness as circumstances will allow. To harbour resentment and to meditate retaliation, are utterly inconsistent with that Christian charity, which *covers a multitude of sins.* They are indications of culpable pride, more than of becoming dignity; and

they lead to many undesirable and pernicious consequences. Whereas a conciliatory disposition; a willingness to admit reasonable concessions; and a promptitude to pardon aggressors, who are sensible of their error, and who are fit objects of forgiveness, are evidences of an amiable meekness and humility; and they conduce, in various ways, to our own honour and peace, and to the harmony and happiness of social life.

I observe farther,

Mutual love includes mutual sympathy, or a disposition to commiserate the unhappy and to congratulate the prosperous; that is, in the words of the apostle, to *weep with them that weep,* and to *rejoice with them that rejoice.* This kind of spontaneous sensibility is an endowment of nature. It is improved by culture. It acquires peculiar delicacy and energy of operation from the spirit and precepts of the gospel, and from the example of its divine Author.

Of all the institutions, political or religious, that were ever devised and established, there is not one, that is so well adapted to excite and cherish those feelings and affections, which lead us to participate in the misery and happiness of one another, as Christianity. Other teachers and legislators have inculcated lessons of re-

solution and magnanimity, approaching even to obduracy. They have gloried in stifling and extinguishing the more tender feelings and emotions of the human heart; and they have represented tears both of joy and grief as indications of a weakness and effeminacy, which they have discouraged and condemned. It was reserved for the founder of our holy religion to recommend by his example, and to exhibit in his own character, that admirable combination of fortitude and sensibility; which, whilst it defies danger and death, is tremblingly alive in the participation either of distress or of felicity. Wherever that love, which he enjoins, has taken possession of the human mind, and is become a ruling principle, it overpowers the selfish passions; it expands the heart with benevolent affections; it disposes to compassionate and relieve the wretched; and it shares the delight and joy of the prosperous and happy. Such is its genuine influence in uniting men's views and interests, and in so incorporating them with one another, that *no one liveth to himself;* and no one considers his own affliction or felicity as foreign to, or independent of, that of another.

This leads me to observe,

That mutual love disposes men to study and promote the happiness of one another. With

principles and views of the most liberal and extensive kind, they do not content themselves with alleviating present distress and enhancing the enjoyments of a transitory and momentary existence; but they feel an interest in each other's being and felicity in a future and eternal world. Their counsel, example, and influence are, therefore, employed, as they have opportunity, in promoting the present virtue and piety in connection with the future happiness of those they love.

After this concise and hasty sketch of the chief outlines and distinguishing properties of that love which the text enjoins; it will not only occur to every one's own reflection that Christianity inculcates it, but it will be easy to shew what it has done, towards recommending and enforcing it.

Should it be said that the fact does not correspond with the doctrine of Christianity, and that its practical influence has been very partial and defective;—we might reply, that this was foreseen and predicted; that the operation of the best principles is gradual and progressive; and that many circumstances have occurred to obstruct and retard the prevalence of those of the Gospel. We might allege, that the corruptions of Christianity and the interference of worldly power, deriving assistance from it and

applying it to its own views and purposes, have contributed to prevent or to diminish its genuine effect. We might indulge the pleasing expectation of a period, when it shall be reformed and renovated; when it shall be emancipated from the shackles which human policy and ambition have imposed upon it; and when, unendowed and unadorned by the liberality of those, who have made use of it for their own ends, as it was in the first ages of its establishment, it shall so prevail as to justify the renewed reflection of observers: "Behold how these Christians love one another!" In the mean while it should be considered, that a thousand years are with him, who inhabiteth eternity, but as one day; and that the interval of delay may bear a very small proportion to that of the unrestrained dominion and illustrious triumph of Christianity.

But without pursuing these reflections, we may observe, that those who charge Christianity with being the cause of that discord and variance, to which it has given occasion, do it the greatest injustice; and that, by this mode of reasoning, knowledge and liberty, and the choicest blessings which human beings have ever enjoyed, and which have been the most perverted and abused, should be renounced and execrated as the greatest evils.

Let the impartial and candid examine our religion by the character of its Author, by the nature of his doctrine, by the history of his undertaking, and by the expectations and prospects which he leads his faithful followers to entertain; and they must acknowledge, that it is in a peculiar and eminent degree the religion of peace and love.

What a pattern of benevolence has our blessed Lord exhibited in his own disposition and conduct! Well might he say to his disciples, *Love one another, as I have loved you.* In the condescension of his birth, in the labours of his life, in the reproaches and sufferings which he endured for their sake, as well as in the precepts which he inculcated, we discern the evidences of his love to mankind: and we may hence infer the obligation of meekness and forbearance, of placability and forgiveness, of sympathy and kindness, and of active service, in our conduct towards one another. The whole history of our Saviour's life is the most eloquent and persuasive lecture which could have been delivered on the duty of mutual love.

His doctrine likewise, deriving energy from his example, inculcates the same lesson. Does he not teach us, that we are all children of the same parent; alike sinful and guilty; and by

the grace of his gospel and the efficacy of his mediation, alike recovered to the hope of pardon and assistance; and equally candidates for future felicity and glory? Thus allied to one another by our derivation from God; by the common participation of the bounties of his Providence and the blessings of his grace; by the circumstances of guilt and weakness in which he found us and in which he was manifested for our relief and rescue; by the possession of similar privileges under the dispensation, which he has established; and by the same animating hopes with which he has inspired us:—Thus allied to one another, nothing need be said to evince the obligation of mutual love. None can hesitate to acknowledge, that it was his design to inculcate and enforce the exercise of this affection on his disciples. If we had not upon record a single precept to this purpose; if we had been left to deduce our duty by mere implication and inference from his general instruction and doctrine: we could have been at no loss in concluding it to have been his intention, that his disciples should be known and distinguished by their love to one another.

In the course of his undertaking likewise, was it not his professed aim, was it not the object, to which his views were directed and

which he actually accomplished, to abolish those distinctions that divided mankind and alienated them from one another? Did he not break down that wall of separation, that had been long the impassable boundary between Jews and Gentiles? Did he not annul the obligation of those ritual observances, that formed an inclosure which fenced around one nation of the earth and long preserved its distinction from the other inhabitants of the globe? —Did he not humble the pride of heathen philosophy and raze the foundation of Jewish selfishness and bigotry; and open a wide avenue to his church, through which men of every nation, of every party, of every profession, might have access to it; in which, when admitted, they might be united by the bonds of love? Did he not erect a standard, to which he invited persons of all descriptions, that were *weary* and *heavy-laden* under the burden of antiquated and useless ceremonies, or perplexed with error, doubt and fear; give them an opportunity of surrendering long existing prejudices; and encourage them to acknowledge and embrace one another as brethren, though they had for ages regarded, each the other, as an alien and an enemy? Did he not establish an asylum, to which those who were ransomed from guilt and death might repair; where they

might find *rest to their souls;* and happy in themselves, rejoice with and congratulate others, who were in the same happy circumstances with themselves?

By thus removing the obstacles that lay in the way of mutual conciliation; by extending the means and offers of salvation to all without exception and without respect of persons; and by throwing open, as it were, the gates of the celestial paradise to all, who were disposed to enter on the conditions which he prescribed; did he not powerfully enforce the law of mutual love? To say no more in this way:—Did he not direct men's views to the same future habitation? Did he not encourage their hopes, in a course of holy obedience, of being associates in employment and blessedness for ever? Could he have inculcated any principles; could he have presented any prospects, that were more likely to extinguish the most latent spark of resentment and animosity; to make men friends *now* who were to be companions *hereafter;* and to bind those by love to one another on *earth,* who were tending to the same everlasting abode in *heaven?*

If there be any conciliatory, attractive, cementing principle in nature; it is the hope of future union in society, employment and felicity. It is the prospect of dwelling together

in the same abode, and of participating the same happiness without interruption and without end. None can now harbour a single sentiment of discord and malevolence towards those, who are to be their associates, when the errors and imperfections of mortality are done away. "I cannot," may each of us say, "otherwise than love those with whom I am to live for ever; whom God loves; whom the Saviour will own and honour; and whom he will think meet for sharing with myself the bliss of immortality." Such are the prospects, which Christianity reveals; and let those who hear me say, whether its divine author might not reasonably expect; whether he might not authoritatively ordain; that they should love one another?

Little need be said to evince the peculiar and distinguishing excellence of this test of our relation to him, as his true disciples. We are called, indeed, by the same name; we embrace the same faith; we assume the same visible profession; we conform to the same outward modes of worship; we observe the same public institutions. These are tokens of our attachment to Christ. They are ostensible signs of our respect for Christianity and of our veneration of its divine author. But instances have occurred, in which these have been equivocal and fallacious tests; and allowing them their due

praise, for they are unquestionably entitled to praise; they are far inferior in worth and excellence, as well as in importance and use, to the criterion or test of mutual love. This constitutes an unquestionable and conspicuous resemblance of the founder of our holy religion. It is an evidence of the conformity of our judgment and heart to his instructions and precepts. It is the most decisive proof we can exhibit that we have imbibed his spirit, and that his religion is incorporated with the sentiments and affections of our souls.

Love is the most amiable and pleasing disposition we can indulge. In the estimation of others, it is the brightest ornament of our character. It diffuses around us a beautiful and brilliant lustre, which will attract the notice and admiration of observers, and which will be reflected, with beneficial effects, on the religion we profess; so that this will be esteemed and honoured.

Besides,

Mutual love, by uniting us to one another, will form a kind of phalanx or embodied band among Christians, which will strengthen their interest; augment their power in supporting and defending their religion; and be the means not only of preventing it from sinking into neglect, but of reviving it when it is declining, and of perpetuating it

to future generations. This will do more to serve the cause of Christianity, when many desert the profession of it, and some renounce even the belief of it, than any other means less consonant to its nature, to which its sincere but mistaken, or its feigned and interested, friends are too apt to recur, when they conceive it to be in danger. Such means are more likely to excite discord among Christians than to promote union. They furnish its enemies with pretences for reproaching it: and it has been the effect of every kind and degree of persecution to disserve the cause which it has professed to honour. Mutual love amongst the various professors of Christianity, however they may differ in creeds, and forms, and outward modes of worship, would extinguish the spirit of persecution, and render it as needless as it is ignominous and hurtful.

Independently of the honour, which the Christian faith would derive from the exercise of a candid, forbearing, benevolent and affectionate spirit amongst its votaries of different sentiments and denominations, and of the service which would be thus done to the Christian cause and the invaluable interests connected with it; the prevalence of this temper would very much contribute to personal and social happiness. It would either wholly prevent or

soon terminate every kind of discord. It would be the never failing source of domestic harmony and of public tranquillity. In the Christian church it would be the most effectual preservative of that union and peace, which no other tests, however rigidly enforced, have been able to produce or to perpetuate.

Charity is the only bond of perfectness. Other tests can only make hypocrites or martyrs. They can only produce an unity of *outward profession* among persons of discordant sentiments; and this is an attainment, which has been often sought and secured at too dear a rate. Love is the only union of minds. Where this prevails, no evil that is to be dreaded can arise from difference of opinion, or from different modes of profession and worship.

Farther,

The excellence of the test, which our Saviour has established, appears from its aptitude to all circumstances and times, or the universality of its application. Other bonds of union and modes of discrimination, depending on creeds and forms, are as variable as the clime or country in which our lot is cast, or the community and church to which we belong. But mutual charity is a badge or character of distinction, that will serve for all churches in all countries; for every place and every period; for every

nation and every age, in which Christianity is known and professed. And it has this eminent advantage, that it will never interfere with the rights of conscience, but preserve them sacred and inviolate; nor will it subject our integrity either to suspicion or reproach. With a view to the universal diffusion and permanent duration of his religion in the world, our blessed Lord has enjoined this token of discrimination: *By this shall* ALL *men know, that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

The excellence of this distinction of Christian faith and practice will farther appear, if we consider, that it is a distinction which is durable as eternity. When all our present discriminating appellations and outward forms of profession shall cease, and we compose a part of a *great multitude* of glorified and happy beings *which no man can number;* when our faith shall be transformed into sight and hope be accomplished in fruition; our love to one another will remain, and acquire a refinement and energy, which will render it a source of consummate and never-ending felicity. Love is the very element of heaven. It is the vital principle of celestial spirits. From the uninterrupted and increasing exercise of it we shall derive permanent and increasing felicity through eternal ages. Well then might our Saviour enjoin the culture of that prin-

ciple and the exercise of that affection, which is inseparable from the soul itself; which will survive the decay and dissolution of our present corporeal frame; which will outlive every worldly connection and interest; and which will be the cement of our society and a principal source of our blessedness through eternity.

To the test which has now been illustrated and recommended, let us refer our own character and state. By this reference, we may form a more decisive and satisfactory judgment concerning ourselves, than by any speculative opinion, however true and important, or any of those outward forms and modes of worship to which we adhere, however reasonable and useful. Under the influence of mutual love, we shall never contend, otherwise than with the spirit of meekness and reciprocal forbearance and candour, and with a view of obtaining information and improvement, on a variety of subjects, which have agitated and convulsed the Christian world. We shall freely allow to others the liberty we claim for ourselves; nor think the worse of any of our fellow-christians, and even of those who will hardly return to us this appellation; because we and they may differ in our creed or our mode of worship. Avowing our own sentiments on every necessary occasion, we shall concede to others the

same privilege; nor ever arrogate to ourselves a freedom from prejudice, an honesty of research, and a peculiar illumination, which others may possess in an equal or even in a greater degree than ourselves. *Every man standeth or falleth to his own master.* With regard to all disputable and disputed subjects, we should recollect, that *he who judgeth us is the Lord.* In the mean while, let our *love be without dissimulation;* and let it be our wish and endeavour, as far as it is consistent with a regard to truth and duty, to maintain *the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.* The longer we live, the more shall we be convinced that the prevalence of charity is of infinitely greater moment than a thousand speculations, which have no immediate influence on the heart and conduct.

Let our mutual love appear in our solicitude to make one another good and happy. So far from attempting to unsettle the faith of any or to diminish their attachment to the forms and institutions of religion, let us do what lies in our power, by instruction and example, to establish and increase them. As means to a higher end;—to a virtuous conduct, and the attainment of the happiness connected with it, let us recommend and enforce them.

From the excellent rule or test of discrimination, which our Saviour has established, we

may infer the excellence of Christianity itself. The nature of his religion may be discerned in its leading and predominant feature. How mild must be the government! How gentle and benign the institution! How condescending and gracious the teacher, legislator, and lord, when mutual love is to distinguish and characterize his disciples and subjects! It is not a multitude of burdensome ceremonies; it is not costly sacrifice; it is not corporeal penance; it is not a voluntary surrender of our persons to the flames, and of our property to the spoiler, which he requires. These are the creatures of enthusiasm and superstition, and the demands of powers that invade the dominion of God and of his Son, and that trample on the rights of conscience and the pleas of humanity. *By this*, says the prince of peace and the benevolent Saviour, *shall all men know, that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

Amidst the discord and variance that sometimes distract the Christian church in the present period of its existence, notwithstanding the pacific tendency of its genuine principles and spirit, let our minds be comforted and animated by the prospect of that glorious season, naturally to be expected and actually foretold, when love and peace shall universally prevail:—when, in the beautiful and expressive

figures of Isaiah, *the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling, shall herd together, and a little child shall lead them; and the cow and the bear shall feed, their young ones shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den; when they shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*

Finally, Let us aspire to the region of perfect peace and love. Discord and tumult rend the church and distract the world. From scenes of devastating conquest, carnage, and blood, let us direct our views to the tranquil asylum prepared for the upright and holy; to that unmolested and eternal rest that remaineth for the people of God.

SERMON X.

ON A WOUNDED SPIRIT.

PROVERBS, xviii. 14.

The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity: but a wounded spirit who can bear?

IT is a truth too obvious to need either illustration or proof, that the happiness or misery of human life depends more on the state of the mind than on the outward condition. Some persons possess ample means, without a corresponding capacity, of enjoyment; whilst others, whose resources are scanty and precarious, and who are exercised with a variety of trials, are apparently much happier than the prosperous and affluent. Of this notorious fact, no satisfactory account can be given, without adverting to the inward temper as well as to the outward circumstances, and without admitting the

truth of the maxim in the text: *The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity*, whilst *a wounded spirit* is the most intolerable of all evils. If the mind be firm and unbroken, calm and self-possessed, and provided with internal resources of succour and consolation; the outward calamities of life will make but a slight impression, and they may be endured without any very perceptible and permanent interruption of enjoyment. But if the spirit be discomposed and dejected, whatever may be the sources and occasions of its disquietude, no advantages of external condition, no health and ease, no success and prosperity, no honour and affluence, can counteract and counterbalance these inward causes of vexation and misery. They prey upon the vitals; they are a gangrene at the root of human happiness; they secretly undermine the foundations, and overset the pillars upon which the goodly fabric rests; and however secure and splendid it may appear to the passing observer; whatever gaze of admiration it may excite, and whatever praise may be bestowed upon it by those who judge merely by appearance; it is in a tottering state, and its ruin is inevitable. In other words, the mind is the seat and spring of true happiness, and it can have no stability and permanence, nay, it can have no real subsistence; the appearance of

it is mockery and delusion; if the inward frame and temper of the soul do not concur with the external condition in contributing to its reality and its duration.

These reflections are evidently suggested by the words of the text; and they are justified by the actual experience of human life. Allowing their truth and importance, how necessary is it that we should be well informed and duly apprized, what is that state of mind which shall enable us properly to sustain the evils incident to our condition, and to convert the outward blessings of it into means of real and permanent felicity.

To this inquiry our attention is now directed; and it is an inquiry, the importance of which none, who think justly and who value their own happiness, can hesitate to acknowledge. *The spirit of a man*, says Solomon, *will sustain his infirmity;* that is, the mind, in a proper frame and state, will encounter and endure the vicissitudes of life without timidity and dejection: but what that state is? how it may be acquired and maintained? and how it contributes, to produce the effect that is here ascribed to it? are questions, which it concerns us to resolve, as we shall thus obtain both a directory of conduct and a guide to true happiness.

The temper of mind, from which this benefit is to be expected, is contrasted against *a wounded spirit;* that is, a troubled and dejected mind, which itself needs encouragement and support, and which can, therefore, be of no avail in administering succour and consolation in a season of external distress.

By the *infirmity*, to which the text refers, we may understand not only the disorders and pains to which our bodily frame is subject, but all those adverse and afflictive occurrences to which we are liable in a state of vicissitude and frailty: and the precise object of the inquiry before us is, how the mind may be rendered superior to the external condition; to such a degree at least, that we may have inward sources of satisfaction and felicity, when our health is impaired by sickness; when strength is succeeded by decay; when our views and prospects are cheerless and alarming; and when affliction, in one form or other, demands the exercise of fortitude, patience, and resignation?

I observe,

1st, It is a principal requisite of the state of mind here supposed, that it should have no occasion for self-crimination and self-reproach. Guilt is timid and enfeebling. It creates suspicions and excites alarms, which discompose

and depress the spirit. Bereaved of tranquillity and self-possession, and destitute of that confidence and resolution, which rectitude of conduct inspires, the satisfaction which prosperity affords will be very partial and precarious, and the shock of adversity, real or apprehended, will sink it into despondence and despair. The man, whose conscience condemns him in the review of life, not for involuntary errors, not for casual offences, for these are incident to human weakness; but for continued neglect of acknowledged duties, and for wilful and repeated transgressions; will feel, in their ten-fold accumulation, any calamities that occur. So far from regarding them as the appointed trials of his virtue, and as part of that discipline, which a gracious parent ordains for the amelioration of his temper and the improvement of his character; he will consider them as penal evils; as indications of displeasure; as corrections of justice; as tokens of awful retribution. Under the impression of these views, he will expect them with a trembling spirit; and when they occur, however light and trivial they may be in themselves, his own imagination will annex to them attendant circumstances of aggravation, which enhance to an inconceivable degree the distress they occasion. When he looks around him, he finds

himself enveloped in darkness; except that here and there he discerns, or fancies that he discerns in vivid characters, through the gloom that surrounds him, the mementos of his guilt; —accompanied with apprehensions similar to those which Belshazzar felt, when he saw the hand-writing on the wall; a sight which loosened his joints and made his whole frame to tremble. In vain does he seek protection and succour in the hour of his distress. In every face, he thinks that he beholds the aspect of a foe. Pity he interprets as insult. To those, whose mere compassion prompts them to relieve him, he is ready to say: *Miserable comforters are ye all.* To the throne of the universe he cannot dare to lift up his eyes. The thought of omnipotence, connected with justice, and inflicting deserved penalty, frets every faculty, and harrows up every feeling of his soul. Thus bereaved of every outward resource; barred from access to every refuge; and despairing of succour from every helper, which the compass of creation might afford him; he retires within himself, and in the recesses of his own mind he meets the most implacable foes; the monitors of his demerit, whose censures and reproaches totally incapacitate him for enjoying the good which he possesses or bearing the evil which befalls him.

To a person of this description, the happiness of others is an aggravation of his own wretchedness. He pines and frets, when he sees others, in many respects, perhaps, less distinguished than himself, deriving satisfaction from circumstances less favourable to enjoyment than his own, and enduring afflictions more severe than those with which he is exercised, without petulance and complaint. The transient observer may, probably, be at a loss to account for his unhappiness. Ignorant of his true character, he may be ready to express surprise at his dissatisfaction with the destiny assigned him; but known to himself and to God are the secret causes of his discontent. Although others may acquit or even applaud him, the reproaches of his own mind disturb his tranquillity, poison his pleasures, and add poignancy to the sufferings he endures.

We need not wonder that persons, whose state of mind has now been delineated, should be incapable of enjoyment in any external condition; or, that a spirit thus wounded, should be unable to sustain the infirmities of human nature, and the vicissitudes of human life.

To guilt there are two antidotes, obduracy and pardon. The former is a partial, inadequate, uncertain and temporary remedy. It may, possibly, avail in an easy and prosperous

condition; but in a period of alarm and danger, it will be insufficient. When reflection, long stifled, is roused by apprehended or real distress, the mind will not be able to recover its energy. Without resources from itself or succour from others, it will be very unfit to contend with the evil that besets it. The only effectual antidote to guilt is a sense of divine forgiveness; and next to not having offended at all is the state of those, whose transgressions are pardoned, whom God, according to his gracious promises by Jesus Christ, has restored to peace and favour. But the most happy condition of all is that of persons, whose consciences acquit and approve them in the review of life, and who have no reason for timidity and despondence, whatever may be the events that befall them. Self-approved, their spirits will be erect and firm, calm and tranquil, prepared for action or for suffering, in every scene of life. With these internal resources; with their mental powers composed and vigorous, and ready for any exertion which changing circumstances may require; they need not tremble; they will not be dejected, whatever may be the vicissitudes that await them.

I add,

2dly, A mind free from the influence of tumultuous and distressing passions is necessary for maintaining an honourable and victorious

conflict with the trials of this frail and mutable life. It is needless to describe the enfeebling influence of those appetites and passions, that are corporeal and animal. An addictedness to gratifications and pleasures, in reference to which these predominate, unnerves the vigour of the understanding, and exalts the brutal part of our nature above the intellectual and manly; and whilst the former is unduly advanced, the latter must of course be weakened and depressed. The enervating influence of sensuality and luxury is proverbial. The experience of individuals and the history of civil communities furnish a variety of facts, that establish this truth. Dissipation and pleasure, of the nature and in the excess which we are now supposing, are not only detrimental but destructive to the vigour of the mind; nor can we expect any signal exploit, any illustrious display of fortitude or of patience; from those, whose mental powers are thus relaxed and deadened. It is by the restraint and discipline of the passions, and not by the indiscriminate and immoderate indulgence of them, that a manly spirit, a spirit capable of conflicting with trials and encountering danger, is acquired and maintained. The Carthaginians under Hannibal were vanquished by the Romans, not in the field of battle, but in the luxurious and im-

pure retreats of Capua. Rome herself, long the mistress of the world, and the arbitress of the fate of distant kingdoms, fell a sacrifice at the shrine of enervating luxury and intemperance. Amongst individuals also, both in the Heathen and the Christian world, who have been the persons that have acted and that have suffered laudably? Not the devotees of pleasure, who have set no limit to the gratification of their animal passions; but those who have sacrificed pleasure to duty and maintained the superiority of the man to the brute. Well then did our divine Saviour exhort his followers to prepare for the scene of service and suffering which he set before them, by *denying themselves* and *taking up their cross*.

An inordinate love of the world and an unrestricted pursuit of secular honour and wealth are also prejudicial to that firmness and vigour of mind, which qualify men for acting and suffering illustriously in the cause of truth and duty. When any sordid interest is held in high estimation, it will be sought and retained with a degree of eagerness and tenaciousness, to which principles of integrity and virtuous honour will be tamely surrendered. Loss and injury will be avoided and emoluments of a worldly nature secured; sometimes at the hazard of making sacrifices which no secular advantage can compensate.

The *spirit of a man,* that is superior to his outward condition, and that is prepared for encountering distress and danger, must be guided by different views. It must be actuated by nobler principles. It must rise above the world. Treasures and honours of a transient and perishable nature must lie low at his feet; and he must be able to look down upon them, from the eminence to which he is exalted, with an eye, not of contempt, not of absolute indifference; but of rational and just discrimination. He must be accustomed to appreciate them in the degree they deserve, and be ready to resign them, whenever they interfere with treasures and honours of a more valuable kind;—those that pertain to the understanding and the heart, to truth and integrity, to virtue and immortality.

Pride is another passion, which is inconsistent with that mental tranquillity and self-possession, on which true happiness in the versatile and varying circumstances of human life necessarily depends. When men are accustomed to *think of themselves more highly than they ought to think,* on account of their natural talents or acquired endowments; their birth and rank; their station and condition; their wealth and influence; they are prone to claim and to expect an undue degree of deference. Indulging this disposition, they are often disappointed; and the peace of

their minds is discomposed by trivial circumstances, which true wisdom and a just estimate of themselves would teach them to overlook and despise. To persons of this description adverse events of every kind, when they occur, will be mortifying and vexatious; and feigning to themselves an imaginary privilege of exemption from the heritage of mortality, they will be unfit to encounter the vicissitudes to which their condition is liable. Their happiness will ebb and flow with the tide of their fortune; and it will be as precarious and inconstant, as the mutable fashion of the world.

That superiority of spirit, which the text recommends, consists in true humility; in the culture and exercise of that disposition which will lead us to adapt our expectations to our state and to accommodate our temper to honour or dishonour, good report or evil report; an exalted or abased condition; affluence or a more scanty portion of good; as a wise Providence shall ordain.

Farther,

In order to acquire and preserve that spirit, which will enable us to act or suffer with propriety in the circumstances assigned us, we should guard against envy. That kind of sensibility, which renders men jealous of one another; which leads them to fret and repine

when they behold others more prosperous, more honoured and more affluent than themselves; and which induces them to withhold from such persons that respect and congratulation to which they are entitled, because their own lot is more humble and their disappointments have been more numerous :—this kind of sensibility, which is the source and concomitant of envy, manifests a spirit, that is not prepared for an honourable conflict with the trials of the world.

Moreover,

Anxiety, discontent, and impatience are indications of a mind, that does not adapt its views and temper to the fluctuating and uncertain condition of human life. These dispositions, so far as they prevail, will be sources of inquietude and vexation. They will incapacitate both for suffering and enjoyment; and will deprive us of that portion of happiness, whether it be greater or less, which our outward circumstances are designed to afford us. Without enlarging in this way, we proceed to observe,

3dly, That the spirit of a man, which, in the most comprehensive sense of the text, will sustain his infirmity, must be fortified by religious principles. The mind, we are ready to allow, is more or less firm and vigorous in different persons by its natural formation, or by its con-

nection with the corporeal frame. Culture and exercise increase this difference. Outward circumstances have a necessary effect in tranquillizing or discomposing our mental faculties. Admitting these concessions, religious principles have a real influence in strengthening the powers of the mind and administering encouragement and consolation. Although false notions of religious truth and duty, as well as erroneous apprehensions, which some persons have entertained concerning their own character and state, have been the sources of uneasiness and alarm; yet it is certain, that just sentiments of religion have a tendency to compose and cheer and strengthen the spirit, and to fit it for doing and bearing the divine will. We may also venture to add, that they have, in many illustrious and laudable instances, produced this effect. They have made the feeble strong; the timid, resolute; the oppressed, triumphant; the afflicted, happy; the dying, more than conquerors over the terror and anguish of dissolution. History records the powers of religion, when called forth into exercise, in courts and camps, before magistrates and judges, in the cells of dungeons and in the varied tortures of a premature and ignominious death. Those, who dispute the efficacy of religion to produce these effects, must discredit

all history. They must question the testimony of experience. They must be equally incredulous, whether we allege the conclusions of just reasoning or the authentic record of facts. In every assembly of Christian worshippers, there are some, who are able to do justice to religion in this respect; and who can say, they themselves have known the support and consolation, which it imparts. Let us pass in cursory review some of the chief principles, which religion inculcates; and then ask the unprejudiced and candid, whether they are not calculated to produce the effects ascribed to them; and whether it must not be our own fault and infelicity, if we do not derive succour and solace from them in a season of distress?

Has faith in the Providence of God, directing and disposing the concerns of mankind with infinite wisdom and benevolence, and by the agency of a power, which no impediment can controul, no influence on the reflecting mind at a period, when it is reduced to the necessity of seeking support and consolation? Do we derive encouragement and comfort from the compassion and sympathy, from the good wishes and active assistance, of a friend in a time of trouble? Is there any such friend as God;—knowing the whole of our case, remembering our frame, acquainted with every avenue of access to our

minds, controuling by his almighty energy the course of nature and the train of events, and equally able and willing to sustain and comfort those who confide in him? No person but an absolute infidel; no one that has not the apathy of a stoic; none but those whose judgment is perverted by scepticism, and whose hearts are harder and colder than the adamant, will contend, that such sentiments as these are not adapted to strengthen the feeble mind and to cheer the disconsolate.

Consider again, what effects a regard to the presence and inspection of such a Being are likely to produce. Under the eye of a respected friend:—that friend, our superior, our benefactor, our helper, how does emulation, how does the laudable ambition of being applauded, rouse every latent power of the mind; invigorate every faculty; and impart energy of exertion and activity to every principle of the understanding, to every affection of the heart, and to every effort, to which honour and interest and duty urge us! But what is the inspection of all the great and wise and good, could they be united in one assembly, and be at the same moment spectators of the inward springs and outward displays of our conduct, compared with that of the all-knowing witness and final judge of man!—of that Being, who perceives the re-

motest principle of conduct as well as the external act; whose just appreciation of our character nor possible prejudice or interest can pervert; whose approbation confers real dignity; whose praise crowns its objects with immortality!—of that Being, who can aid our weakness, who will overlook our failings, and who, through the all-sufficient mediation of his Son, Jesus Christ, will accept the upright and sincere, notwithstanding their defects and imperfections!—of that Being, who has been, who is, and who will be, infinitely more kind and bountiful to us than the mightiest and wealthiest and most munificent of mortals—than, indeed, the whole creation!

Has a reliance on the promises of God no tendency to dissipate doubt and fear, to inspire confidence, to encourage patience, and to assure to us relief or rescue, seasonable aid or suitable counsel, as our circumstances of trial may require? Adverting to his gracious promises, let us at the same time recollect, that they are not the dictates of frail and erring man; who knows not the extent of his own power nor the exigency of our case; who is mutable in his purpose and feeble in the execution of it, and who is unable to direct and controul the course of events:—but they are the words of invariable truth and faithfulness, deriving an efficacy pe-

culiar to themselves from the power that accompanies them, and which is able, in defiance of every kind of opposition, to accomplish them.

Has a persuasion, that we are, upon the whole, and notwithstanding many imperfections, objects of approbation to this great and good Being, no effect in reconciling us to any condition, which he allots us; in engaging us to bear whatever he ordains, without murmur and resistance; and in inducing us to surrender every interest to his wise and gracious disposal?

Having pursued meditations of this kind, and deduced from them the conclusion which they naturally suggest; we may be expected, as Christians, to direct our views to the doctrine, example, and mediation of our divine Saviour; and we may then ask ourselves, fearless of the contradiction of the whole tribe of sceptics and unbelievers, whether the instructions of the Gospel, with regard to the attributes and providence of God, the pardon of repenting transgressors, and the assistance of the humble and upright;—whether the pattern of its divine author, exemplifying self-denial and patience and resignation in the most trying circumstances; —and whether his mediation, certifying the acceptableness of a sincere though imperfect

obedience, be not adapted to strengthen the feeble spirit, to encourage the timid, and to cheer and revive the dejected? They must be grossly, not to say wilfully, ignorant of the main scope of Christianity, who deny its tendency to animate and gladden the heart of man; to render him superior to the world; and to enable him to bear the vicissitudes of his condition with undaunted fortitude and with unquerulous resignation.

I add farther,

It is the province of religion to make us mindful of past benefits; and devout gratitude in the recollection of former scenes of trial will render us unappalled and acquiescing with regard to the progress and issue of those, that yet lie before us. Have we escaped danger? Have we vanquished difficulties? Have we been supported in trouble and rescued from it? Are we now able to review and acknowledge its beneficial effects? Should not these considerations fortify and compose our minds in the prospect of future trials? Past experience should inspire us with magnanimity and patience; with contentment and resignation, in the farther progress of our years. If our trials should be renewed and varied, we have recourse to the same benevolence and power, the seasonable displays of which in

past instances we have such ample reason to acknowledge.

I shall only add,

4thly, That *the spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity*, provided that it be animated by the hope of future blessedness. The *fashion of this world passeth away.* The vicissitudes of it are hastening to a termination. Reflection on the brevity and uncertainty of the present period of our existence should tranquillize our minds amidst its equally momentary and precarious concerns. But let us consider, that we are endowed with principles; that we sustain relations; that we possess interests, which are more durable than time and the world. Immortality is our destination. The spirits that inhabit our mortal bodies will survive the dissolution of our corporeal frame and the wreck of the material universe. Their destination for eternity attaches to them a dignity and value, that are inestimable. If we are warranted in directing our views to a state of interminable felicity; if we are animated in our course of service and suffering by the hope of immortality; we may justly reckon that the tribulation of the present life is not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed to us.

With these enlarged prospects, we may be

firm and fearless, tranquil and resigned; whatever may be our present condition. We are like mariners setting out on the ocean of life within view of our destined port. The next gale, though the clouds may gather and threaten an approaching tempest, will land us safe on the happy shore. Our conflict with the swelling surge will be of short continuance. We are under the conduct of a pilot, who knows the dangers of our navigation; and he will guide us in security and triumph to the blessed haven. Having this hope, let us possess our souls in patience and peace; and with a fortitude and resignation, becoming those who are animated by this excellent principle, let us pass through things *seen* and *temporal;* through scenes of alternate suffering and enjoyment; till we are put into possession of a happiness now *unseen* but *eternal* in its duration.

SERMON XI.

A PRESERVATIVE AGAINST MISTAKES, WITH REGARD TO THE NATURE AND EFFICACY OF REPENTANCE.

LUKE, XV. 31.

And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me; and all that I have is thine.

THE primary design of the parable to which these words belong is well known. It was intended to prepare the way for admitting the Gentiles into the Christian church, and for extending the privileges and benefits of the Gospel dispensation to them as well as to the Jews. The time was approaching, in which the distinction between the children of Israel and other nations, that had been originally established, and that had been long maintained

for the wisest and best purposes, would be abolished; and it was necessary gradually to dispose the minds of the Jewish people for an event, which they regarded as humiliating, and in which, as the sequel of their history shews, they would not acquiesce without opposition and reluctance. Having been accustomed to consider themselves as the peculiar favourites of Heaven, and to look upon the inhabitants of other nations as aliens and enemies; they were ready to imagine, that their temporary constitution was immutable, and that they had an exclusive right to the blessings both of divine Providence and grace. Our Saviour well knew the inveteracy of their prejudices, and with a wisdom and condescension, for which he was eminently distinguished, adopts the most gentle methods for eradicating them. In a case, where a direct attack would be dangerous and detrimental, he uses other means, that were much more likely to ensure success. Without prematurely and precipitately declaring, what was the design and what would be the effect of his mission and advent, with respect to the peculiar polity of the Jewish nation, and thus exciting the implacable resentment of those who were zealously attached to it, he leads them to infer the event from his general conduct, and he prepares them for it by allusions

and parables, which it would require no great sagacity properly to understand and apply. With this view, he associates, in the course of his ministry, with Gentiles as well as Jews. To the former, as well as to the latter, he extends the benefit of his instruction and of his miracles; and he embraces every opportunity that offered itself for conciliating their mutual regard and attachment.

This wise and benevolent design is too apparent in the parable before us, to escape our notice. The Gentiles are represented under the denomination and character of the prodigal son, who, in an age of ignorance and inexperience, left his father's house, and by his folly and wickedness reduced himself to a situation of great distress. The calamities he had incurred awakened his reflection, and disposed him to seek a refuge under the roof of a parent, which he had abandoned. In this exhibition of the degeneracy and guilt of the idolatrous Heathens, our Saviour has admirably blended several circumstances, that tended to excite the commiseration of those to whose view it was presented. The youth of the prodigal tacitly insinuated an apology for the Gentiles, who laboured under many disadvantages with regard to the knowledge and practice of their duty. Their deplorable state,

represented by his distress, could not less than move their compassion. Their penitent disposition, exemplified by the prodigal's humiliation and return to his father's house, rendered them fit objects of relief and succour. The Jews, on the other hand, appear in this parable to advantage. They are exhibited under the character of the elder son, who had been dutiful and obedient; and who had always shared the tokens of parental kindness. No description could have been more likely to conciliate their concurrence in the benevolent plan of Providence, and to induce them to admit the Gentiles into a joint participation of Christian privileges and blessings, without reluctance and murmur. Their own pre-eminence is allowed. The Heathens are recommended by the degeneracy of their character and the distress of their situation, to compassionate notice; and both are represented as children of the same father, and sharing his benevolent regard. Thus does our Saviour, by the most amiable and condescending attention to the prejudices of the Jews, prepare them for the unlimited distribution of the benefits of the Gospel, and dispose them to unite with the penitent and believing Gentiles in the faith and profession of Christianity.

The sequel of the parable informs us, with what obstinacy they would resist the gracious counsels of the Almighty; with what reluctance they would surrender their peculiar and exclusive privileges; and how disinclined they would be to acknowledge the divine authority of a religion, that comprehended Gentiles as well as themselves in its distinguished benefits. The elder son took offence at the kindness that was manifested to his repenting brother, and refused to associate with him. The father expostulates with him on the unreasonableness and ingratitude of his conduct in the words of the text: *Son, thou art ever with me; and all that I have is thine.*

Such as I have now explained was the primary design of the parable before us; and it was excellently adapted to the purpose for which it was intended. Whilst it prepared the minds of the Jews for an important event, that would speedily occur; it contained a prediction of the circumstances that would attend it, the fulfilment of which must evince the supernatural knowledge of our divine Saviour. That the Jews conceived a prejudice against Christianity, because it abolished the distinction that separated them from other nations, and that they objected to the admission of be-

lieving Gentiles into the Christian church, without conforming to the ritual observances of their law, are facts, recorded by the sacred writers, and affording satisfactory evidence of the prophetic character and divine mission of Jesus Christ.

But this parable served to answer another very important purpose besides that which we have already mentioned. It was designed to encourage the hope of penitent transgressors of every age and nation. Amongst the auditors, to whom it was originally addressed, there were persons of this character. Humbled and anxious, under a conviction of their demerit, they wished to obtain the assurance of pardon. With this view, they resorted to Christ, as to a divine teacher. He perceived the solicitude that agitated and depressed their spirits. He describes the sentiments and feelings, the inclinations and purposes that accompany true repentance, in order to aid them in judging concerning their own state. He assures them of success in their application for pardon, by the example of the prodigal son, who was kindly received by a compassionate and forgiving parent. No verbal declaration could contribute so effectually to their relief and encouragement, as the various circumstances of the parable which he recites. He

leaves the application of these circumstances to themselves; not doubting that they would derive from them the consolation, which their case required.

Some persons, however, not duly considering the principal design of this parable, as well as of other passages, that represent, in a manner the most forcible and satisfactory, the placability of God and his readiness to forgive true penitents, have deduced from them a very unwarrantable inference. Not satisfied with the only conclusion that can be justly drawn from such passages; that God is mercifully disposed to pardon repenting sinners; they have represented repentance as more acceptable and pleasing to God than a course of uniform obedience. Because the passions and feelings of penitent transgressors are more sensibly excited; because they produce a more observable effect; because persons in this state are more visibly solicitous to obtain pardon and favour; because their zeal is awakened by a sense of their danger, and by a concern to escape it; and because their change of conduct attracts notice; repentance has been thought more deserving of approbation and praise than the calm, steady, progressive practice of piety and virtue. It has received from the multitude a degree of applause, which has

not been commonly bestowed on the conduct of those, who have seldom deviated from the path of duty; who have pursued, with few intermissions and failings, a regular course of unoffending and irreproachable virtue; or who have had, comparatively, no occasion for repentance, or, at least, for any very observable change in their disposition or practice. There are many, I trust, of this character; who, under the influence of religious principles, imbibed in their youth and cherished in maturer years, have been preserved from any very culpable, flagrant, and repeated violation of their duty either to God or man. Although the most blameless and exemplary are subject to failings and imperfections, yet as they are neither wilful nor habitual, the gracious Being, who knows our frame, overlooks and forgives them.

Repentance, or what has been so called, is sometimes the mere emotion of the animal feelings and passions, produced by the operation of mechanical causes, and subsiding almost as suddenly as it was excited, without any permanent effect either on the judgment or the conduct. By this kind of repentance some persons have been deluded. They have called it conversion, and they have supposed it to be an instantaneous act, proceeding from the irresistible

influence of divine grace, and transforming the vilest sinners into saints, and evincing their title through faith in the merits of the redeemer to pardoning mercy and everlasting salvation. But supposing that there is no misconception or delusion in the case, shall any say, that the repentance of those who have been wilful, deliberate and continued transgressors, however sincere in its principle and durable in its effect, is more acceptable to God or more beneficial to man than the character which we have just described? Is there no difference of character among sinners themselves, previously to their repentance? Are there no degrees of depravity and vice among transgressors? Is not the conduct of some more aggravated and more atrocious than that of others? Can we imagine that a just and holy God does not perceive or that he does not regard the various gradations of criminality and guilt? Nevertheless we should be apt to imagine, from adverting to the language of some of the most popular preachers, that all sinners are alike in the divine estimation; and that the most culpable and profligate are the most likely to obtain mercy; and that sinners of any class, who repent, are more acceptable to God than the unoffending and virtuous. No notions, whatever sanction they may have received from the delusion of enthusiasm, can be more erroneous or

more pernicious. Innocence is undoubtedly preferable to repentance. It is better not to offend than to be sorry for having offended; as it is more desirable never to be ill than to recover from a painful and dangerous disorder. The conduct of those who, in the general course of their lives, avoid the practice of iniquity and maintain an irreproachable character, is unquestionably more pleasing to God and more estimable in the judgment of sober reason than the contrition and good resolution and actual reformation of sincere penitents. When men have neglected their duty and transgressed the divine law, it is their wisdom to repent of their folly and to amend their lives; and they may think themselves happy that they are allowed the privilege of repentance. But they would have been much more wise and more happy, if their conduct had given no occasion for that regret and sorrow, for that anxiety and disquietude, which are inseparable from true repentance; and which in degree must correspond to the nature and aggravation of their preceding crimes.

Far be it from me to discourage the hope of any true penitent! and yet it is necessary to guard against the pernicious effects of mistaken notions on this subject. The parable of the prodigal son has led some persons to imagine, that

God is better pleased with the return of sinners to their duty, after having long neglected it, than with the continued obedience of those who have never or seldom offended. This erroneous principle has encouraged the presumption of transgressors; flattered them with vain and delusive hopes; induced them to defer repentance to an uncertain futurity; and at the close of a mispent life inspired them with a fallacious confidence in the divine mercy and favour. Conceiving that their character and state depend merely on their penitence, and that they shall be equally acceptable in the sight of God with those, who have devoted their lives to his service; they turn a deaf ear to every counsel of religious wisdom, and persist in a course of iniquity, till those awful circumstances occur, in which it will be necessary for them to avert the displeasure and to secure the favour of the Almighty. Repentance in their creed is the whole of religious virtue. This, they suppose, will produce an instantaneous and entire change in their disposition and character; and when danger is inevitable, this will be a safe refuge to which they can recur.

If there be any fallacy that has multiplied the dreadful hazards of that which has been usually called a death-bed repentance more than any other; that has made men heedless and uncon-

cerned about their conduct in the progress of their lives, and flattered them with the hope of being secure in the final issue; it is this:—a mistaken notion of the nature of true repentance; of the rank that belongs to it in the scale of human duties; of the fruits and effects that ought to accompany it; and of the degree of estimation and value, in which it is regarded by the supreme, impartial, and infallible sovereign and judge. If mere repentance claims the distinguished privilege and benefit, which the negligence and presumption of too many seem to ascribe to it; if it be a refuge so secure, as they apprehend; if it constitute so complete a qualification for divine favour and future felicity, as they imagine; if it may be admitted as a substitute for uniform integrity and virtue and for the exemplary conduct of many years, devoted to piety and holiness; if this be the case, how needless the self-denial! how fruitless the labour! how absurd the practice of those, who *by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, honour, and immortality!* What awes do the government of God, and the prospect of futurity, furnish to restrain the licentious and wicked! what encouragement do they afford to the pious and obedient! what kind of connection remains between the present character and the future recompence either of the good or

wicked! How inconsiderable and how uncertain the benefit derived from education and discipline, and from all the means, which divine wisdom and goodness seem to have provided for the cultivation, and defence, and advancement of our piety and virtue! If mere repentance be supposed to answer every purpose of security and happiness, which the anxious minds of intelligent, accountable, and immortal beings can wish to obtain; if it be considered in any other view than as the commencement of a religious and virtuous conduct, to be justified and perfected by a corresponding temper and practice; if it consist, as too many have imagined, in the unavailing regret and ineffective purposes of a dying hour, destitute of every advantage for evincing its sincerity and for producing a permanent influence on the disposition and character;—we mistake its nature; we misapprehend its importance and utility. The repentance, which God will accept, and which will ultimately avail to the happiness of mankind, derives its value and use from the sentiments, in which it originates, and from the real, visible, permanent change, which it produces in the temper and conduct. And in this view of it, the only view which reason and scripture warrant, it can never be preferred, either in the judgment of God or man, to a

constant and persevering obedience:—to an obedience, which, notwithstanding all its interruptions and failings, constitutes the character and will ensure the peculiar and distinguishing tokens of divine favour.

This important and interesting truth, so encouraging to those, who endeavour through life to maintain an irreproachable and exemplary conduct, is evidently implied in the declaration of the text. *Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.* Notwithstanding the strong expressions of sympathy and affection, with which the father received the repenting prodigal, and testified a disposition to forgive his past errors and transgressions; he assures his elder son, who had never deserted him; who had never wilfully offended him; that he was the object of his unabated and distinguishing regard.

The moral instruction suggested by the parable is plainly this; that God is inclined to compassionate and forgive penitent transgressors; but at the same time, the objects of his peculiar favour are the upright and obedient. The condition of those who have maintained their integrity and virtue, and whose uniform conduct has been guided by the counsels of wisdom and influenced by principles of piety, righteousness and benevolence, is more honourable and more happy, than that of penitent sinners, however

sincere their repentance, and however complete their reformation. God regards them with superior approbation, and he will distinguish them in this world and in that which is to come, by peculiar tokens of his favour. The brief illustration of this truth may serve for the encouragement of persevering and progressive piety and virtue.

Let it be considered,

1st, That persons of this character have been less chargeable with the guilt and folly of offending God and doing injury to religion and the best interests of mankind. The repentance of sinners cannot obliterate the traces; it cannot destroy the effects, of their past conduct. They exist in the humbling and painful recollection of their own minds; in the dishonour which God and religion have suffered by their means; and in the culpable negligence and criminal conduct and detrimental consequences, which their counsel and example may have occasioned. What would a noble earl have given, in the moment of his distress, according to the account which Bishop Burnet hath recorded of him, if he could have cancelled every line he had written, that had a tendency to corrupt the mind and to depreciate the obligations of religion and virtue! Every sincere penitent, whatever may be his rank and sta-

tion, must experience similar feelings in the remembrance of any injury, which his conduct has occasioned to the heedless and unwary; to those with whom he has been immediately connected, and with all to whom his influence has more remotely extended.

Whatever may be the regret of such as have endeavoured to maintain consciences void of offence towards God and man under the consciousness, that they have not been so active and useful as they might have been; their minds are not disquieted by the reflection, that they have been accessary to the guilt and misery of their fellow-creatures. They have not corrupted the innocent. They have not undermined the principles of religion in youthful minds. They have not encouraged the neglect and violation of important duties. They have not been the counsellors and abettors of the licentious and profligate. They have admonished the unthinking. They have encouraged the wavering and irresolute. As far as their example and influence have extended, they have promoted the exercises of piety and the practice of virtue. How soothing and consolatory to the mind in every review of life are reflections of this kind! How powerfully do they recommend an early and unintermitting attention to every part of our conduct.

I add,

2dly, Persons, who have cultivated and maintained a sense of religion and a regard to virtue in the progress of their lives, are free from those doubts and fears, with respect to their state and prospects, which perplex and distress penitent transgressors. Although under the Gospel dispensation there can be no doubt, that God will pardon repenting sinners; yet it is not so easy for such to ascertain to their own satisfaction the sincerity of their repentance. The humble, contrite spirit, is timid and anxious. Those, who are the most proper objects of forgiveness, will often be most diffident of themselves; most sensible of their demerit; most apprehensive of the doom they deserve; and least able to assure their hearts before God. Time and reflection, and perseverance in well-doing, are necessary to inspire them with confidence in the pardoning mercy of God; and some have been occasionally perplexed with doubt and terror through the whole course of their lives. Whereas the mind that possesses peace and self-approbation in the review of life, can exercise at all times and in all circumstances trust in God; and derive from the consciousness of his favour consolations, adapted to every exigence and distress. The pious principles and devout

affections, which it has been the uniform endeavour of the upright and obedient to cultivate and improve, will exclude all disquieting terrors; and the experience they have had of the loving-kindness of God will forbid their entertaining any doubt of his future care and favour.

3dly, Those, who have been regular and irreproachable in their general conduct, are more likely to be stedfast and persevering in a religious profession and practice than others, who have been reclaimed by repentance from a course of iniquity. It is not easy to restrain corrupt inclinations, that have become imperious by indulgence; to subdue evil habits, that are rendered obstinate by repeated practice; and to overcome temptations, to which men have often yielded, and whose power is almost invincible, in consequence of frequent and successful assaults. The true penitent has many difficulties, with which to contend, when he forsakes a course, to which he has been long addicted; and when he devotes himself to the practice of virtues, against which his propensities and habits strongly militate. He will not soon acquire facility in the practice of his acknowledged duty; nor partake, without renewed conflict, of the satisfactions and pleasures, which religious wisdom imparts to its

votaries. His progress will for a considerable time be slow and joyless; and he will be urged by strong inclinations and powerful temptations to return to the course, which he has abandoned. Happy he may think himself, if by the concurring succour of the Almighty, he is enabled to persevere!

How much more safe, and easy, and pleasant is the progress of those, whose early and advancing years have been consecrated to God and religion! They possess every advantage which principles and habits acquired betimes and improved by exercise; which mental powers strengthened by use; which happy experience, and the assured assistance of the grace of God, can afford them. They cannot depart from the path in which they have been accustomed to walk, without reluctance and regret. They cannot desist from pursuing it, without counteracting every obligation of gratitude and interest, as well as of duty. Every motive, that can address itself to their understandings and their hearts, to their conviction and experience, urges them to persevere. The pleasures they enjoy and the hopes they entertain are, in their estimation, too valuable to be sacrificed for any gratification or advantage, which the most prosperous iniquity can propose. All their propensities, all their habits, all their

expectations, constrain them to *go on their way rejoicing. Strong in the Lord, and by the power of his might,* they cannot be *weary of well-doing.* But *their path will be as the morning light, which shineth more and more to the perfect day.*

I shall only add,

4thly, That repenting sinners have no reason to expect that distinguished recompence, which is reserved for those, whose obedience has been constant and persevering; and whose eminent attainments in holiness and virtue, after a long course of exercise and proficiency, qualify them for a corresponding felicity. The future happiness of the righteous, though a grant of free favour, is not an arbitrary gift. *Every man shall receive according to his works.* Those, who have maintained through life an irreproachable and exemplary character; and who have been distinguished by their piety, and probity, and benevolence, will be proportionably advanced in honour and felicity by the sentence of the final judge. And although no sincere penitent, however numerous and aggravated his offences have been, shall be excluded from mercy; although the grace of the Gospel has provided for his indemnity and acceptance; and he has abundant reason for gratitude; yet justice requires, that, where there is a real difference of character and of attainments, there

should be a corresponding distinction of recompence. God, however, is a righteous and merciful judge; and to repenting sinners, who, notwithstanding the advantages under which they commenced the profession and practice of religion, have distinguished themselves by an exemplary and useful conduct, which has sometimes been the case, he will grant peculiar favour. Allowing for these excepted cases, the doctrine suggested by the text is indisputable, that early, regular, progressive piety and virtue are preferable to the most sincere repentance, and will ultimately ensure a proportionable degree of approbation and reward. *Son, thou art always with me, and all that I have is thine.*

Whilst we are thankful for the encouragement which the gospel affords to true repentance, under a sense of our own failings and transgressions, and of the prevalence of sin in the world, let none pervert it into an occasion of criminal presumption and security. Those who continue in sin with a resolution of availing themselves of this privilege, and who defer embracing the benefit it offers, are likely to derive no advantage from it, when their necessity may constrain them to seek it. There is not a more dangerous fallacy than that which leads men to persist in the practice of iniquity with the purpose of future repentance. It is like

neglecting or rather encouraging the progress of an alarming disorder, that we may apply a remedy in that stage of it, when it is almost incurable. Let us consider, how much better it is not to sin wilfully and habitually, than to flatter ourselves with the hope, that we shall live to repent of our conduct; that our repentance will be sincere; and that God will accept it.

From this subject, let us learn the wisdom and importance of acquiring in early life, and of cultivating in our maturer years, principles and habits of piety and goodness. It is the least advantage, which we shall derive from them, that they will prevent the necessity of founding our hopes of every thing that is most interesting and valuable to us, on the uncertainty of a sincere repentance, for which we may have neither opportunity nor inclination. They will render repentance needless. They will establish a character, which shall be in a great degree free from reproach and blame. They will contribute to our security amidst the temptations of the world. They will lay a foundation for tranquillity and even triumph, when we leave it: and they will be the means of preparing us for the approbation of our final judge; and of advancing us to eminent stations of honour and felicity in his heavenly kingdom.

SERMON XII.

THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD ILLUSTRATED.

2 CHRONICLES, vi. 18.

But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee!

SOLOMON, having completed the work which David his father had assigned him, of constructing and furnishing the temple at Jerusalem, appropriates it to the sacred purposes for which it was intended, by an act of religious worship. With this view, he convened the people, and with a solemnity, suitable to the occasion, he conducted their devotion. The words we have read were part of the address to God, which he delivered on behalf of himself and of the multitude that was assembled; nor could any

words more aptly express the sentiments of humility and gratitude, of reverence and delight, which must have possessed their minds at such a season and in the performance of such a service. Whilst Solomon was supplicating that manifestation of the divine presence and those emblems and tokens of the divine favour, which he was encouraged by divine promise to expect, and which he would naturally consider as the highest distinction and honour that could be conferred on the magnificent and costly edifice he had constructed; he makes a kind of pause in his prayer, as if he had been too presumptuous in his petition and expectation. Although he had reason to believe, that God would verify the promise which he had made to David his father; and though the *schechinah,* or visible cloud, that was the symbol of the divine presence, had already appeared in the temple; he seems to hesitate, as if he had been asking a greater favour than he had a right to expect, and to express a degree of surprise, that the great object of his worship would condescend to grant his request. *Will God,* says he, *in very deed dwell with men upon earth?* This is an act of condescension; this is a distinguishing privilege, on which we have no just claim. We are utterly unworthy of this signal honour, and we must ascribe it to the unmerited goodness of the Almighty. Nei-

ther the magnificence of the temple, on which so much skill and labour and treasure have been expended; nor the value of the sacrifices that are presented in it; nor the number of those who frequent it for the purposes of devotion; nor any rites and services, which they perform, when actually assembled; can establish a right to that manifestation of divine favour, which we are now invoking. Our expectation of it is founded on the mercy and faithfulness of God. Whilst we recognize his promise, and indulge the hope of its accomplishment; it becomes us to adopt the language of wonder and self-humiliation, and at the same time of thankfulness and joy: *Will God in very deed dwell with men upon earth?* That God, whom *the heaven of heavens cannot contain*, i. e. whose presence is uncircumscribed by any finite limits, and the glory of whose majesty is exalted infinitely above the highest conceptions of the most elevated rank of beings.

The words of the text, however, are the language, not of doubt, but of devout admiration. They do not express any degree of incredulity with regard to the favourable attention which God would manifest to his sincere worshippers, but a kind of grateful wonder, that he would notice objects so mean and unworthy. None of those persons to whom the light of revelation

was ever communicated, even in the most obscure dawnings of it, could entertain any doubt or disbelief on this subject. The Jews were so fully instructed with regard to the doctrine of a special Providence, that it formed the groundwork of their whole system, political and religious; and from them this doctrine extended itself to those with whom they associated. It was reserved for a class of philosophers in the Heathen world to deny, that their deities had any interference in the concerns of mankind; and to affirm, that it was beneath their dignity and inconsistent with their happiness to attend to the affairs of the human race. Of course such deities could be no objects of worship or confidence; and their deluded votaries might as well have denied their existence as their counsel and agency in the administration of the world. From the Scriptures we derive very different sentiments concerning the object of our trust and worship. What these sentiments are, and how they should influence our temper and practice, the declaration of the text will naturally lead us to consider. *Will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee!* We have in these words,

1st, An explicit acknowledgment of the omnipresence of God. This is a truth which they

not only imply but express; and it is no less positively affirmed, though it is delivered, for reasons already recited, under the form of an interrogation. This mode of expression is more lively and more impressive; and suggests a greater variety of ideas than if it had been simply asserted, that God dwelleth with men upon the earth, whilst the heaven of heavens cannot contain him. Perhaps it was necessary; it would unquestionably be useful; on an occasion like that to which the text refers, to guard the Israelites from conceiving that Jehovah, their God, was like the deities of neighbouring nations, finite and local, and incapable of directing their attention to a variety of objects and cases at once. Although the God of Israel manifested himself by a special emblem of his presence in the temple, and the Jews might probably imagine, that his attention and favour were peculiarly restricted to themselves; Solomon leads them to entertain more just and honourable sentiments of the Sovereign of the universe. He presents to their adoration and homage a being, who not only manifested himself in the Jewish temple, and on behalf of the Jewish people: but who *dwelt with men upon the earth;* who extended his notice and care to the inhabitants of the whole globe, however separated from each other, as well as

to the inhabitants of Judea; and who comprehended, within the extent of his administration, the interests of innumerable beings and worlds, of the multitude and variety of which the human imagination can form no just conceptions. Thus, Solomon, having first addressed his prayer to the Almighty, as the God of Israel, enlarges his views; and proceeds with the contemplation of him, as condescending to dwell with men on the earth; and last of all, he regards him as filling the unmeasurable extent of infinite space with his presence; or, as a being, whom the *heaven of heavens*, i. e. the whole expanse of the universe, could not contain. By this beautiful climax or gradation, he assists us in forming intelligible ideas of the immensity of God. He ascends from one degree of perfection to another; from that view of the divine presence which was circumscribed, as it were, by the boundaries of Judea and the local interests of its inhabitants, to that attention which comprehended the earth and the whole human race; and finally, to that dominion and agency, which are both unlimited and everlasting.

Whilst our conceptions of the omnipresence of God are thus aided, we are at the same time furnished with one evidence or proof of this divine attribute. The perfection of any being

depends on the comprehension of his views and the extent of his operations. If Solomon had addressed the Deity, merely under the appellation of the God of Israel, and proceeded no farther in his contemplation and description of him; we should have formed less honourable, grand, and enlarged, ideas of him than we are now enabled to do by considering him as extending his presence and attention, not only to the earth and its occupiers, but to the unbounded universe.

As God is infinitely perfect, he must be every where present. If we set limits to the presence of God, we proportionably degrade his excellence and diminish his perfection. If he does not exist and act every where, he is so far an imperfect being. Besides, if we deny the existence and agency of God in any one place, we may deny that he exists and acts in every other; and, consequently, he does not exist by that kind of necessity of nature, which belongs to the underived and self-existent being. But waving these more abstruse demonstrations of the omnipresence of God; demonstrations, however, that are satisfactory and convincing to those who are accustomed to this kind of reasoning; we may observe, that God *is*, wherever he *acts*; and we perceive traces of the divine agency every where around

tis. The visible creation is in this sense full of God. There is not a point of space; there is not an atom of matter, which does not bear testimony to the presence and influence of God; and as it is a first principle, that no being can act where it is not, the agency of God, which is universal, must evince his universal presence. Wherever we discern an effect there must be a cause; and of course all the matter and the motion which we observe in the universe constrains us to admit the vital presence and constant energy of the Almighty. Without God, the universe would be a chaos. The sun and stars, that gild the firmament by day and by night, would be extinguished. The planetary worlds that move around them in regular order and uninterrupted harmony would cease to move; their arrangement would be disturbed; their mutual influence be suspended; and they would no longer serve any of the beneficial purposes to which they are adapted.

Life, more especially, in all the varieties and gradations of it, from that of the meanest insect to the highest rank of intelligence; in its continuance and in its succession and renewal; indicates the presence and agency of God. Every living being owes the origin and the permanence of its existence to the Deity; and wherever, therefore, life is produced, sustained,

and prolonged, we behold undeniable evidence of his presence and influence. Moreover, as the universe, wherever we are able to extend our views, exhibits displays of counsel and agency, there must be an intelligent agent, whereso-ever we see the effects of wisdom and activity.

But the declarations and discoveries of revelation, with regard to the omnipresence of God, supersede the necessity of every kind of reasoning. The Scriptures abound with very animated and impressive descriptions of this divine attribute: and we need only peruse them, frequently and seriously, in order to awaken in our minds just conceptions of it, and to render the sentiments we thus acquire permanently beneficial. *Whither*, says the Psalmist, *shall I go from thy spirit*, i. e. from thee, *or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell*, or in the grave, *behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me; and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me; yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day. The darkness and the light are both alike to thee.*

I proceed to observe,

2dly, That the declaration of the text expresses the attention manifested by an omnipresent deity to the character and condition of mankind. The phrase of dwelling with men upon the earth denotes, that human beings are the special objects of the divine notice and regard. In accommodation to our limited apprehension, as we are best acquainted with the disposition and state of those with whom we reside and associate, and as our knowledge is improved by frequency and continuance of intercourse, God's *dwelling with men upon the earth* intimates, in an instructive and intelligible manner, his perfect acquaintance with our circumstances and character. He is the witness of our conduct, in its principles and motives, in the habitual tenour and progress of it, and in all its relations and effects. Such is his knowledge of the human character, so direct and comprehensive and complete his intuition of it, that he can never err in the judgment he forms; and so just and impartial is his judgment, that he can never pronounce on any an unrighteous sentence. Such is his knowledge of the understanding and disposition of mankind; of the prejudices by which they are apt to be misled, and of the passions that are constitutionally most predominant; and such his acquaintance with the situation in which they are placed; with all the advantage-

and disadvantages of it, so far as they respect their religious and moral conduct, that none need be apprehensive of not finding God to be a witness and judge, as compassionate and indulgent as he is righteous and impartial.

Our condition is likewise known to God, as well as our discriminating character and conduct. None of our fellow-creatures, who have most intimate and frequent access to us, who are in the habit of constantly conversing with us, and to whom we most freely communicate our situation and experience, can, with all these means of information, be so well acquainted with our circumstances, whether they be prosperous or adverse, with all our apprehensions concerning them, and with all the effects which they are likely to produce, as the omnipresent and all-knowing God. He sees, in their distant approaches, our danger and distress; he perceives in their remotest consequences the good we enjoy and the evil we endure. He is, therefore, infinitely more competent to provide for our succour and relief, whatever be the nature of our case and the perils of our condition, than the most faithful, affectionate, powerful friend, who may be most disposed and most able to serve us. Besides, as he is always and every where present with us, however we may be separated from those who are most anxious

for our welfare and most inclined to promote it, we may have recourse to him, and he may have access to us, at seasons and in situations, when the wisdom and the affection and the power of human friendship can be of no avail.

These reflections lead me to observe,

3dly, That the phrase of *dwelling with men upon the earth* implies, that God by his counsel and agency secures and promotes the true interest of those, who are the fit objects of his favour. As we are led by affection and duty, and by all the habits and usages of social life, to pursue measures that shall be most conducive to the true happiness of those, who, by their residence with us, are supposed to be more immediately the objects of our love and care; the expression of God's dwelling with men gives us reason to conclude, that he is not an uninterested, inactive spectator of mankind. He is good to all. Men of every description partake of the bounty of his providence and enjoy many of the blessings of his grace. But his dwelling with men upon the earth seems to denote a privilege, more select, more appropriate, and more distinguishing; and warrants our observing, what other passages of scripture without number explicitly assert, that God directs a peculiar attention to those, whose character he approves; and that the dispensations of his

providence and the established laws of his government are conducive to the preservation and advancement of their highest and most permanent felicity. Not to add, that when special occasions occur, which require and justify some signal and extraordinary token of favour, God will not withhold from such persons his protection and succour. In the doctrine of a particular Providence, adapting its interpositions to particular cases and situations, as it has been satisfactorily explained by its advocates, there seems to me to be nothing irrational; and it will be generally allowed not to be unscriptural: whilst all will acknowledge, that, without deviating into the folly of enthusiasm, it is the source of much encouragement and consolation. In seasons and circumstances of danger and distress, personal, social, and national, good men are justified in reposing their confidence in God, in supplicating his protection and assistance, and in referring themselves and those for whom they are concerned, and every important interest, to his over-ruling and all-disposing Providence. From the phrase of his dwelling with us we may deduce the reasonableness and the advantage of such exercises of piety and devotion; and if we recur to the experience of human life, we can have no ground for questioning their utility. Nay, instances will pre-

sent themselves to our grateful recollection, in which they have contributed to the tranquillity and solace of our anxious and troubled spirits. Whilst we neglect none of the ordinary means of security and supply, of defence and relief, our minds will be animated in every suitable effort and consoled when our best efforts seem to prove unavailing by the reflection, that the counsel and agency of God concur with us, and will direct the progress of events to a favourable issue, however unperceived by ourselves; and in the mean while impart needful and desirable support and consolation.

We are thus naturally led to inquire, with what sentiments and affections the consideration, that *God dwelleth with men upon the earth* in the manner already illustrated, should be regarded.

The presence of God with us in all places and on all occasions cannot be duly contemplated without filial reverence and awe. To some, indeed, the thought of such a witness of their ~~conduct~~ and of such an observer of their condition may well excite terror. Conscious of guilt, they will tremble under the conviction, that God is not far from them; and that, as he observes their behaviour, and the events of their being are subject to his controul, he can never be at a loss for means to make them sensible of

his displeasure. The thought of an incensed observer and judge, in whose hands are their times and all their ways, must be humbling and distressing. It must be an alloy to their enjoyment and an aggravation of every evil that befals them. Like the hand-writing on the wall to wicked Belshazzar, this thought must alarm them in the season of their festivity, and terrify them in the hour of their calamity and distress. But to those who have reason to hope, that upon the whole God beholds them with approbation, and that his compassion and clemency spread a veil over their errors and failings, the presence of God will be productive of a very different kind of awe. It will not be a slavish terror but a filial reverence. It will be a veneration, in which love and fear are happily blended; which will make them cautious and circumspect in their conduct; which will dispose them to conciliate his favour and to avoid whatever would render them unworthy of his approbation.

With affectionate gratitude, and at the same time with self-humiliation, should we reflect, that God dwells with man upon earth. What indeed is man, that God should be thus mindful of him! that he should condescend to notice us, and to make our happiness the object of his attention and agency! When we consider, on the

one hand, his majesty and glory, his holiness and rectitude, his independence and immutability; and, on the other, our own meanness and unworthiness, and the unspeakable importance of his attention and favour to our present and everlasting welfare, we may well be astonished, that we are not neglected and disregarded by him. With what thankfulness and with what humility should we reflect, that a being, whose presence fills the immensity of space, and within the sphere of whose notice and administration are comprehended numberless worlds and ranks of creatures superior to the earth and its inhabitants, should deign to make us and our interests the objects of his regard? If we consider merely the station in the scale of his creatures which we occupy, connecting sense and reason, intellectual and animal existence; and compare ourselves with those gradations of spiritual beings that ascend above us; we have reason to admire and celebrate the condescending goodness, which comprehends our concerns. But when we recollect, that we are frail and erring, that we are imperfect and sinful beings, and that we are incapable of rendering suitable returns for such condescension, and too often indisposed to render such returns as our faculties and station admit of; we have still greater reason for gratitude and self-abasement. In what accents of

praise, by what expressions of thankfulness, with what indications of self-humiliation, ought we to acknowledge the distinguishing privilege of God's dwelling with us, and manifesting to us in such a variety of ways his presence and favour? To his house, where he has promised to vouchsafe his peculiar presence to his sincere and humble worshippers, should we gratefully and gladly repair; *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is;* and though we have not the same sensible displays of his divine presence, which were granted on the occasion referred to in the text, we have the most satisfactory assurance, that God regards those who engage in the exercises of social devotion with favour and approbation.

Moreover,

What motives do we derive from the reflection, suggested in the text, to resolution and firmness, activity and diligence, constancy and zeal in the course of holy obedience, which the God, who thus regards us, has prescribed! Whilst the consideration, that God dwells with us, furnishes lessons of caution, it also affords us powerful inducements to be steady and persevering, patient and resigned in doing and in bearing the divine will.

The presence of God should animate us amidst the weaknesses of our nature, and the

trials of our state. It should inspire us with an emulation, urging us to aim at high degrees of religious and virtuous attainments, rendering us ambitious to excel in the cultivation and practice of whatever God requires and approves, and encouraging us under a sense of our frailty and in our conflict with the difficulties and temptations to which we are liable. God is with us as our observer and our helper. What farther encouragement can we need or desire, in any scene of service, in any season of trial, that may yet await us?

Amidst all the vicissitudes of our condition, as well as the conflicts to which a course of integrity and obedience may expose us, the presence of God will administer consolation and delight, and it will engage our trust and acquiescence. Far from human help, or in circumstances where human power can be of no avail, the thought of God's presence with us will be animating and delightful. To him let us direct our views. In his providence let us repose our trust; the aids of his power, and the comforts of his goodness let us supplicate. Remote or ineffectual as every other power may be, he is never far from us: at home and abroad; in solitude and in society; in a time of bodily affliction, mental anguish or worldly distress, he is a God at hand and not afar off. The

sigh which can reach no human ear; the tear that falls unnoticed by our fellow-creatures; the sigh and the tear, which we may wish most studiously to conceal; or which, if regarded, can procure no sufficient relief, God will compassionate, and in one mode or other he will administer help and comfort. To him then let us recur; and let it be our solicitude so to think and act, that we may have good ground to hope for his pity and succour. We shall thus be prepared for expecting the consolations of his presence in that awful hour, when flesh and heart fail us; and when human friendship, however sincere, ardent and powerful, can be of no avail. Having committed our spirits to God through Jesus Christ, in the way of well-doing, may they be safely conducted to those mansions in which the presence of God, and of the Redeemer, and of a multitude of glorified and happy beings, will be a source of unmixed, uninterrupted, and everlasting felicity. Amen!

SERMON XIII.

PRACTICAL ATHEISM.

EPHESIANS, ii. 12.

—Without God in the world.

SUCH is the description, which the apostle has given us of the state of the Ephesian converts, previously to their illumination by the doctrine of Christ: and admitting the truth of it, which the most authentic history confirms, no words can express a more lamentable degree of degeneracy and distress; or evince, in a more satisfactory manner, the reasonableness and utility of that divine revelation, which the Gospel contains. Whatever sentiments some of the more enlightened Heathens might entertain concerning the unity and supremacy of the first cause and sovereign ruler of the universe, they had little influence either on their worship or

their practice. They were admitted as philosophical speculations: they were seldom publicly avowed; and the importance of them, as principles of conduct, was never inculcated. Polytheism and idolatry were the established religion of the Heathen world. The immediate objects of general veneration and homage were either senseless images and statues, or imaginary beings, invested with attributes and passions, calculated to mislead the judgment, to corrupt the heart, and to encourage depravity and licentiousness of conduct. At Ephesus there was a superb and magnificent temple, consecrated to Diana, which has been reckoned one of the wonders of the world. The splendour of her worship and the number of her votaries corresponded to the costliness and grandeur of the edifice appropriated to her honour; and the inhabitants of this city were as corrupt and profligate in their practice as they were zealously addicted to idolatry in their sentiments and worship. The character of them which is delineated by the Apostle, and in which there are features of more than common depravity, is authenticated by the testimony of historians, who could have no intention to attest his credibility, and who were under no temptation to exaggerate.

Whatever, therefore, were the sentiments

which reason and tradition might lead the Heathens in general, and the Ephesians in particular, to entertain concerning the perfections and providence of an intelligent and supreme Sovereign of nature, they were not effectual for the regulation of their temper and conduct. It is needless, on the present occasion, to inquire into the existence of principles, which had no practical effect. Nor will it be necessary, in representing the character and condition of those, to whom the description of the text may be more extensively applied, to suppose, that speculative atheism has any advocates.

It is possible to live *without God in the world*, and yet in judgment and in words to acknowledge his existence and dominion. To the case of such persons the expression of the text is justly applicable:—of persons, who may believe the being and agency and moral providence of God, and yet, *in the world*, or in their intercourse with their fellow-creatures, in their secular concerns, and in their habitual temper and practice, exhibit no evidence of their faith, and derive no benefit from it:—of persons, whose principles, whatever they may be, have no influence on their conduct, and who contradict the sentiments which they may occasionally avow, in the uniform tenour of their lives. These are the persons, whose character

we shall briefly illustrate, and whose unhappy condition we shall then represent by way of caution and warning.

It is not easy for those who admit the being and providence of God to exclude all thoughts of him from their minds. Although he is not the object of sense, the evidences of his existence and the effects of his agency present themselves to every observer: and it must require a peculiar degree of inattention to evade those ideas and apprehensions of him, that must naturally occur on a thousand occasions. But of this kind of heedlessness and inattention the conduct of mankind exhibits too many instances; and the persons that are chargeable with it may be justly said to live *without God in the world*. Although he is not far from any one of them, yet if they are regardless of his presence and inspection, they are properly comprehended under the description of the text. Although they are every where surrounded by the tokens of his wisdom and goodness, and they are hourly experiencing the effects of his energy and bounty; yet if they are unmindful of the power that sustains them, and of the displays of his perfections that constantly encompass them, they are, to every moral and practical purpose, as much *without God in the world*, as if they denied his existence and dominion.

They cannot, indeed, annul their relation to the Deity or their concern with him by their inattention; but they can derive no advantage from his local presence and from his cognizance of their conduct, if their thoughts and affections are thus alienated from him. Unless he be present to their minds by serious and frequent contemplation; unless they impress their hearts with a sense of his inspection and knowledge of their conduct, and recollect, that in every period and in every circumstance of their lives, they are surrounded by his presence and subject to his notice; their speculative faith in God will be of little avail, nor will a general acknowledgment of his being and government produce any beneficial effect on their temper and practice. So far as they endeavour to exclude the thought of God, or to dismiss it, when it occurs, and allow themselves to live in an habitual disregard of his perfections and providence, and more especially of his presence and inspection; they are chargeable with the guilt and folly of living without him in the world.

They are *without God*, not because it is possible to prevent his access to them, or to elude his knowledge of their conduct and state. In this way they cannot separate themselves from the omnipresent and all-knowing Deity. They

cannot exist without his constant energy. They cannot withdraw themselves from his notice. He dwells in every place, however solitary and secret, to which they can flee. His spirit pervades the inmost recesses of their minds. In other words, it is impossible to seclude ourselves from God; as we avoid the society and cognizance of our fellow-creatures, whose presence is finite and circumscribed. But those are *without God* who seldom or never meditate on his being, attributes, and character; who do not duly consider that he is their constant witness and will be their final judge; and who do not admit and cherish those sentiments concerning him, which are likely to influence their temper and conduct.

I observe farther,

Those are *without God in the world,* who live in the habitual neglect of the exercises of devotion. These are the appointed means of presenting an invisible Deity to the view of our minds, of aiding our meditations on his perfections and providence, and of maintaining communion with him. Without returning intervals appropriated to these purposes; to the purposes of adoring and praising his excellencies, of acknowledging our dependence and obligations, of supplicating his favour, and of surrendering ourselves to his service and dispo-

sal; we shall be in danger of forgetting God, because he is unseen, amidst the variety of sensible objects that engage our attention, and in the crowd of cares and pleasures that employ our thoughts and time. Seasons and duties of devotion serve to remind us of the existence and government of God; to awaken into exercise those sentiments and affections, which faith in his being and providence ought to produce; to renew their influence, when it is ready to languish; and to render them effectual principles of a holy and virtuous conduct.

These are also means of preserving and promoting a regard to God and religion in the world. The habitual neglect of them indicates the decline of piety, whatever may be the virtue that shall remain, when this is decaying. Devotion is certainly one evidence of our faith in God; of our veneration of his attributes and character; of our conviction of his over-ruling providence; and of our desire to promote his glory and to secure his favour. The customary neglect of it, to say the least, furnishes a suspicion that those who are chargeable with it do not possess that high sense of the duties that pertain immediately to God and that are intended to perpetuate his name, and worship, and honour, in the world, which is ma-

nifested by persons, other circumstances being alike, who regularly perform it.

Another certain, decisive, and indisputable evidence of men's living *without God in the world,* is their wilful and continued opposition to his will and laws. God exists as a legislator and sovereign. This is the character under which he expects to be acknowledged and honoured; and those who withhold from him the submission and obedience to which this character entitles him; who rebel against his authority; who virtually disclaim his right to their homage and subjection; and who live in the habitual violation of his holy laws; may be justly said to be without him in the world. *Depart from us, O God, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways,* is the language of transgressors. By their conduct they declare themselves aliens and enemies; and they pursue a course, that is hostile to his will and government, and that renders them altogether incapable of any communion with him. The acknowledgment which he requires and to which he is entitled is that of the heart. The most acceptable expression of it is a life of obedience to his authority and laws: and, therefore, those who withhold from him the tribute of veneration and homage which he claims, and who refuse to be directed and governed by

him in their habitual temper and practice, may be justly said to live without him in the world.

Another circumstance that distinguishes persons of this character is that they have no interest in the favour of God. The belief of his existence and dominion can yield them no satisfaction. They can derive no benefit from it. With respect to every important and useful purpose, either of encouragement or consolation, they might as well deny his being and providence. They can have no pleasure in contemplating his perfections and government. The thought of his presence and power imparts no delight and inspires no confidence, because they are conscious that they are not fit objects of his regard and patronage. The reflection that, so far from having any reason to expect the tokens of his favour, they are observed by him with disapprobation, and that they merit his displeasure, alarms and distresses them; and is it any wonder, that they should endeavour to exclude, or to dismiss as speedily as possible, those ideas and apprehensions, which can only serve to excite remorse and to produce uneasiness?

But this leads me more particularly to represent the unhappy condition of the persons, whose character we have described, or who are *without God in the world*.

We may observe,

1st, That persons of this character have no principles of acceptable and persevering virtue. Piety towards God is, in itself considered, as necessary and indispensable a part of our religious and moral duty as any other. Without those views and sentiments, those affections and exercises that pertain immediately to God, the character of derived, dependent, moral and accountable beings is essentially defective and incomplete. The plea of personal and social virtue, or of being sober and temperate, humble and courteous, meek and gentle, just and charitable, cannot avail as an apology for the neglect of piety and devotion. If we live *without God in the world,* whatever scrupulous attention we may discover with regard to our temper and conduct in other instances, we are culpable for the omission of a principal part of our duty. The author and preserver of our being, our moral sovereign and final judge, claims our reverence and acknowledgment. His right to our homage and obedience results from his attributes and character. It is enforced by every relation he sustains to us; by numberless benefits enjoyed and expected. This is a right which we cannot dispute; which we cannot oppose; without guilt and danger. If the principles and duties of piety were altogether unconnected with every moral virtue; if they

had no influence on our general temper and practice; they are in themselves fit and necessary. The obligation of them is indispensable. Those who neglect them are chargeable with reproach and blame. The consequences of continued disregard must be perilous and pernicious. *A son honoureth his father; and a servant his master. If I then be a father, where is mine honour? And if I be a master, where is my fear, saith the Lord of hosts?*

But it ought to be considered farther,

That those sentiments and affections, which have God for their immediate object, are fundamental principles of acceptable virtue. A regard to his authority, and will, and approbation, should direct and influence our personal and social conduct; and it should be our governing aim and ultimate end to secure his favour. Other views and motives may often produce very beneficial effects. They may restrain men from sin and encourage them in the practice of righteousness: but without reverence for God and a ruling desire to approve ourselves to him;—without the union of religion, properly so called, with honesty, sobriety, humility, and charity, and other such virtues; we have no ground to expect the peculiar and distinguishing favour of the Almighty. To live *without God in the world* is, therefore, to live without

that character, which he requires; which he will accept; and which he will finally honour with his approbation.

Besides,

The principles of piety are necessary to render our holiness and virtue progressive and persevering. The influence of other motives is local and temporary. It depends upon circumstances and situations, which are fluctuating and variable. It will, probably, fail us, when we shall most need it. But the love and fear of God; a sense of his presence and the hope of his favour, are principles of conduct, which no change of condition can affect. In youth and age; in health and sickness; in prosperity and adversity; with the friendship or the frowns of men; they will induce us to be *stedfast and unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord.* Upon the whole, those that are without God in the world are destitute of those principles, that are necessary to render their virtue acceptable and persevering; pleasing to the Supreme Judge, *who seeth not as man seeth;* and permanent in its duration.

In this connection we may add,

2dly, Persons of this character have no sufficient defence against the assault of temptation. The awe of God and the hope of his approbation will make us cautious and vigilant; firm and

resolute on a thousand occasions, when all other considerations would prove ineffectual. These principles will extend their influence to the heart as well as to the outward conduct. They will assist us in the government of our thoughts and passions, as well as our words and actions. They will thus disarm the temptation that besets us of its chief power. In the most secret retirement as well as in the most public scene; in circumstances inaccessible to human notice as well as under the cognizance of our fellow-creatures; and in those instances of conduct, which, through the ignorance or degeneracy of mankind, are productive of no present disgrace and injury; a regard to God, as our witness and judge, will preserve our integrity and fortify us against the most seducing trials, more than any motive, which external reputation and worldly interest can suggest. Whereas those that are *without God* have no security in various situations of real danger. They possess no principle that is sufficient to controul those corrupt propensities of the heart, which give to the temptation that besets them its principal advantage; and with respect to every act of iniquity, that eludes the cognizance of men, and that is attended with no present injury to themselves, they are left altogether defenceless and exposed. Besides, *without*

God, they are neither animated by the hope nor aided by the communication of divine succour. Should they be overcome in the hour of trial; should they be led captive at pleasure by the enemies of their virtue and peace; should they be surprised, and precipitated into guilt and folly and final ruin; it is no more than they have reason to expect, considering their very unguarded state; and if they would duly reflect on their condition, they might well be alarmed by the apprehension of their danger.

3dly, Those that are *without God in the world* have no sources of relief and consolation to which they can recur amidst the vicissitudes of human life. As long as they enjoy health and ease and prosperity, and need no help or comfort, which their own prudence and power, or the kind attention of their friends, are not able to supply; they may be ready to imagine, that they are sufficient to their own happiness. Whilst every event succeeds to their wishes, and they have no reason to expect any change in their condition, they may indulge that inattention to God and providence which marks their character, without apprehending any detriment or danger. But when sickness, or mental disquietude, or worldly disappointment, or the neglect and unkindness of friends lead them to perceive the mutability of their condition, they will find the want of that

stay and refuge, which piety affords to the children of affliction and sorrow. When other resources, in which they had been accustomed to confide, and which they were prone to think amply sufficient for all their exigencies, fail; they will experience and bewail the infelicity of being *without God in the world.* The thought will then recur with the anguish of remorse and despair: "There is a being who compassionates distress, and whose power is equal to his compassion; but estranged from him in our more prosperous days, we have now no encouragement to apply to him for succour. Will he, whom we disregarded, whilst we thought the means of happiness in our own possession and at our own command, whom we never acknowledged in the season of our enjoyment, and who never heard the voice of praise from our lips; will he bend his ear to the sigh of sorrow; to the complaint and cry, which are extorted by distress? Have we not reason to dread the accomplishment of that awful declaration? *Because I have called and ye refused,— I stretched out my hand and no man regarded; but ye set at nought my counsel and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish come upon you.*

Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but shall not find me, for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord. But whether those, who are without God, shall be thus sensible of the misery of their condition or not; they experience none of those consolations, which faith in God and a sense of his favour administer to the upright and pious:—consolations, arising from a conviction of the wisdom, rectitude, and goodness of his providence; from a persuasion of his inclination and power to relieve and succour them, and from the joyful assurance of the beneficial influence and happy issue of every distressing incident that befals them.

Once more,

4thly, Those that live *without God in the world*, have no ground of confidence in the prospect of futurity. Regardless of his present dominion; of the attention he manifests to the character and concerns of his rational offspring, and of the moral administration which he exercises, and of which there are traces that evince its progress towards perfection; they are equally unmindful of a future state of account and retribution. Heedless of the Being, with whom they have to do, in the present scene of trial and discipline, their views extend no farther than the limits of mortality; they entertain no

expectation of renewing their existence beyond death and the grave. Had they, indeed, any apprehension or persuasion of a future life, they must know that the condition of it is at the disposal of a Being, to whose authority they pay no reverence, and in whose favour they have no interest. They are *without hope*, because they are *without God in the world*. Strangers and enemies, in their disposition and practice, to the Sovereign of that state, into which death conveys them;—to the Sovereign of that state, where *every man shall receive according to his works;* they can expect no privilege, no token of distinction, no testimony of favour. *Without hope,* how lamentable and wretched must be the condition of beings, *whose breath is in their nostrils;* whose tenure is momentary and precarious; and who must soon resign their spirits to God who gave them! To such death is an awful messenger; the grave is a gloomy mansion; and the prospect of futurity, to say the least, unanimating and joyless!

But to those who live *without God in the world,* the condition we have now described would be justly the occasion of self-congratulation and triumph. Happy would they be in the moment of dissolution, or in the expectation of the approaches of it, if the God, whom they have disregarded, would consign them to everlasting

oblivion, and *blot their names* for ever *out of the book of life!* To be *without hope* in their exit from this world to another is a privilege, which they would gladly accept, though it degraded them to the level of the brutes that perish, if they were equally *without fear*. But it is an awful truth, which ought never to be disguised or palliated, that *all who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man, and come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation.* It is no less certain, that those who *live without God* in this world, shall suffer the just effects of his indignation in that which is to come, than that the good and pious shall be approved and rewarded.

From the view which we have now given of the character and condition of the persons described in the text, we see the importance and necessity, the wisdom and utility of impressing our minds with an habitual sense of the presence and providence of God. Nothing can contribute more to our security against temptation; to our progress in well-doing; to our comfort in distress; and to our tranquillity and hope in the hour of dissolution;—in a word, to our present virtue and final felicity, than to set God always before us; to regulate our temper and conduct under the notice of his eye; and in all

the changing scenes of our pilgrimage on earth, to make it our concern and endeavour to secure his favour. For this purpose, let us cherish the conviction of his presence and inspection, of his dominion and government, by meditation and devotion: and whilst we are conscious that he is with us, as our observer and guardian, we shall never wilfully deviate from the path of duty, or despond under any trial that may befal us. He will be our guide unto death; our refuge and stay, when the world can administer no consolation and support; and our portion for ever.

SERMON XIV.

THE PROGRESS OF VICE.

PSALM i. 1.

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

IT is a very common observation, but no less true, important, and deserving of regard, because it is common, that no man becomes degenerate and abandoned at once. The observation is confirmed by a due consideration of the faculties and principles of the human mind, and by an attention to the experience of human life. The dictates of the understanding, the admonitions of conscience, the bias of the will and the sensibility of the affections are favourable to religion and virtue, till they are perverted and depraved; and if, in early life, they have

received any degree of cultivation and improvement, they are not easily counteracted; they are not suddenly corrupted. Prejudices and passions of a contrary tendency are not acquired without resistance and conflict. It will require time and labour, and no inconsiderable resolution, to overcome that reluctance and opposition, that timidity and remorse, that sense of honour and dread of ignominy, and that regard to our safety and interest, which are the natural barriers of our innocence and virtue and the means of their preservation, appointed by our benevolent Former, and derived from the exercise of the powers and principles of our own minds. And does not the testimony of uniform and universal experience confirm the same truth?

There is not a fact in the records of human conduct, more indisputably attested than the gradual progress of irreligion and vice. If evidence were wanting, besides that which our own observation furnishes, we might find it in every page of the history of human degeneracy; where instances to the contrary so rarely occur, that we cannot help considering them as a kind of monsters in the moral world; and we are at a loss to account for the production of effects that are so much out of the common course of nature.

But although the progress of iniquity be gradual, and there are many circumstances that contribute to retard it; there are others that serve to promote and accelerate it: and in all cases, the farther it proceeds, the more rapid will be its advances, and the greater will be the difficulty of a retreat, and the danger of a fatal termination. These are considerations that are obviously suggested by the declaration of the Psalmist in the text; in which he describes the progress of the sinner from one stage of vice to another; as first *walking in the counsel of the ungodly;* then *standing in the way of sinners;* and last of all *sitting in the seat of the scorner.* The gradation here delineated, is illustrated and verified in the course of human conduct. It is conformable to observation and experience. It exhibits the sinner's character in three distinguishing stages of his degeneracy; and as the one is connected with the other and naturally leads to it, they are here presented in one view, by way of caution to the unwary; that they may see the tendency and termination of a course, of which they might otherwise have been ready to form partial and erroneous apprehensions.

It is not by the view of a single error or transgression, detached from others connected with and succeeding it, that the heedless and secure will be sufficiently alarmed. In order to

excite a becoming fear and caution, it is necessary to shew them the train of follies and vices, to which this is the introduction; the whole chain of which this is a single link; and to make them sensible of the connection and dependence which subsist between a single act of wilful and allowed iniquity, and those repetitions and habits, which will gradually enslave their wills and establish an absolute and invincible dominion over them. When the whole group of demons that are ready to take possession, after one has found admission, is set in array before them, they will start back and tremble; they will bar every avenue to their minds, and determine not to surrender in one instance, when they see that a single surrender will be the commencement of a captivity that may issue in entire and inextricable bondage. For want of such views as these, a single miscarriage has often terminated fatally. One wrong step has been introductory to another; and those who would have been struck with horror, if they had seen the consequences of their misconduct in one instance, have nevertheless incurred guilt, without apprehension of danger.

The passage which we have now selected, duly considered, will prevent a delusion of this kind; and it is the more necessary duly to consider it, because the delusion against which it

is intended to warn and preserve us, is not uncommon.

We shall begin with the first part of the description which the Psalmist has given us of the character and conduct of the sinner; or contemplate him in the first stage of that course of folly and vice, which has too often terminated ignominiously and fatally; and by avoiding which a person becomes entitled to the denomination of *blessed.* The sinner begins his career by *walking in the counsel of the ungodly.* We shall illustrate this part of his character and evince his danger.

By *walking in the counsel of the ungodly* we are to understand,

1st, Associating with persons of this character. The phrase in the text denotes more than that kind of society, which is the result of accident or necessity; which the common intercourses of life render unavoidable; and which we are under no obligation, from a regard either to our character or interest, altogether to decline. We are connected, by various social ties and by a justifiable attention to our secular concerns, with persons, whose character in a religious and moral view we may not approve. They may possess qualities which entitle them to our esteem and confidence; and we may associate with them on a variety of occasions, not only without

injury, but with pleasure and advantage. We may derive improvement from the knowledge and experience of those, whose principles we suspect and whose conduct we condemn. They may be amiable and useful in some respects, though they may not deserve our entire approbation. Nay, the relations and the occupations of life will not allow our separating from persons, whose general character is not exempt from reproach and blame. It would argue an affectation of peculiar sanctity; it would betoken a morose and splenetic temper; or it would indicate a parade and ostentation of virtue, to seclude ourselves from those, with whom in domestic and civil life and secular pursuits we are bound to associate. It would manifest a pharisaical pride and hypocrisy more than a regard to our own safety to scrutinize uncandidly into the character of those, with whom duty and necessity require us to maintain an intercourse; or to say to any one of this number, *Come not near me, for I am holier than thou.*

Nevertheless there is an extreme, which it is our wisdom and duty to avoid. We should not walk with the ungodly in such a sense as to make them our chosen, intimate, and confidential companions. We should not recur to their society frequently and habitually, and without a view to some justifiable pleasure or benefit that may be derived from it: we should not as-

sociate with them on occasions, in which they would be likely to make an attack upon our integrity and virtue, and for purposes, reproachful to our character and detrimental to our peace and honour. How much soever we may be supposed to do justice to their amiable and laudable qualities, and whatever claim these may have on our attachment and esteem; we should not be blind to their errors and foibles; we should not disregard what is culpable in their conduct; nor suffer ourselves to be seduced by any ornamental, pleasing and useful qualities they possess, into an intimacy of friendship and a frequency of intercourse, which are at best dangerous, and which have frequently proved pernicious. The uncorrupt and virtuous are in no great danger from the notoriously profane and profligate. Their known character, so justly reprobated, excites abhorrence. To society with such, a mind, that is not already depraved, can have no inclination: and it is scarcely necessary to guard against it by caution and warning. Vice, with open front and presented to full view, furnishes little or no temptation. In its deformed visage and train of ghastly attendants there is nothing that can allure and ensnare the most unwary. It becomes dangerous by being disguised. Its votaries throw a veil over its genuine haggard aspect, and by deceit seduce the incautious. It

becomes those, who value their own safety, then, to beware of its first advances; to strip it of its false attire; and to be upon their guard against the seduction of those, who unite to qualities that are amiable licentious principles and an immoral conduct.

The first indication of degeneracy is a disposition to associate with the ungodly; with persons who, whatever else may be pleasing in their temper, conversation, or conduct, are destitute of that regard to God, which is the first principle and the surest defence of religious virtue. From frequent and familiar intercourse with them danger may be apprehended. The disguise and caution to which their associates owe their security will be gradually laid aside; and having engaged their confidence and attachment, it will not be long before the enticement and example of the corrupt and profligate produce the most pernicious effects. In their society, deliberately chosen and habitually recurred to, the sanctions of religion and virtue will lose their influence; the deformity and horror of vice will be diminished; its injurious effects and final issue will be kept out of view; and without the restraint of religious principle, without apprehension of the hurtful consequences of a sinful course, and with the heedlessness and confidence which companions in

iniquity promote, the case of persons accustomed to associate and converse with the ungodly must be in the highest degree perilous. More especially when we consider,

2dly, That the phrase of *walking in the counsel* of the *ungodly* denotes adopting their principles and maxims.

Among those who have neither ability nor leisure to form any regular system of irreligion, and who have not utterly renounced the fundamental principles of piety and virtue, there are certain opinions, which they have hastily adopted and which they are anxious to maintain, that corrupt the heart and misguide the conduct. These opinions, assumed for convenience and ease, and deriving their chief support from licentious passion and present interest, they are no less studious in disseminating than in defending. They produce them as a kind of plea in their own vindication; they urge them as apologies for their folly and guilt; and every proselyte they make becomes an advocate in their cause, diminishes *their* reproach, as they vainly apprehend, by sharing it with them, and increases *their* security by exposing himself to the same danger.

Having suffered their appetites and passions to gain an undue ascendancy and dominion, they urge the strength of these appetites and

passions, and their inability of controuling and resisting them, as an apology for indulging them. They ascribe to the constitution of nature those powerful propensities to vice, which are owing to their own neglect of self-discipline, and are ready to attribute to natural imbecility and disorder irregular and culpable inclinations, which are the result of their own inattention and depravity. Unaccustomed to restrain and govern their animal instincts and passions, these become violent and impetuous; and instead of tracing this mental disorder, of which they complain, to its proper cause, to their own heedlessness and negligence, they charge it upon God, the maker of their frame, and deduce from it an apology for continued and habitual misconduct. Because they have already suffered the empire of reason to be invaded and its powers of controul to be weakened; they plead an error and fault, chargeable upon themselves, as an excuse for multiplying and renewing their errors and follies.

The mention of such a groundless and frivolous plea is sufficient to expose it: and yet to what besides this do those pretences and excuses amount, which are daily urged by the votaries of vice in their own vindication? Finding themselves unable to resist and restrain the corrupt propensities which they have acquired,

they justify, or at least extenuate, the indulgence of them. Although their own experience must testify, that the difficulty of restraint and controul is continually increasing, they pursue a course, in which the farther they proceed, so much the more will the fallacy of their own plea be exposed.

Another pretence, for it deserves not the name of an argument, by which the irreligious and wicked attempt to justify their own conduct and to seduce their unwary associates, and on which they absurdly value themselves, is this; that they do no injury to any by the practices and pleasures they pursue. If any harm should result from their conduct, it terminates solely in themselves; they are the only sufferers. The property, reputation, and happiness of others they never presume to invade and molest; and, therefore, their guilt is venial, and can expose them to no great danger, to no severe doom.

That they are less culpable than others, it must be acknowledged, is some extenuation of their guilt; but that they are so inoffensive as they pretend cannot be readily allowed. We shall not now argue the case by considering their conduct in its relation to God, whose authority and law they dishonour. Independently of every consideration of this kind, how many anxious witnesses of their conduct they may in-

volve in sorrow and distress, it is impossible to say! How many associates may share their guilt, be hardened in iniquity, and pursue it to a very dreadful, though unapprehended extreme, it is needless to recount! How widely their pernicious example may extend; what mischievous effects it may produce; what reproach it reflects upon religion; what hurtful influence it may have on the harmony and happiness of society; it behoves them duly to consider! A solitary sinner, and much more, a band of transgressors, associated and leagued together for the purpose of indulging their passions and pursuing their licentious pleasures without controul, may do much greater injury than they may be ready to allow, or than they can have any reason to apprehend. If they had any sensibility of spirit; if they had any affection and respect for their sorrowing parents and friends, or any benevolent concern for the virtue and happiness of the society to which they belong, and the benefits of which they participate; if they had any just solicitude for the present and immortal interests of mankind, and for the benign and salutary influence of religion on the present generation or on future ages; they could not claim the praise of being inoffensive; they would not shelter themselves under this groundless plea. But are their own

honour and interest of no value in their estimation? Are they under no obligation to consult and pursue their own happiness? Do they incur no guilt and expose themselves to no censure and condemnation, by personal folly and vice, if they had no connection with others; if their conduct had no influence on any individual besides themselves? The law of nature—the dictate of reason—the demand of religion, is, "Do thyself no harm." And what *harm* they do themselves; how far the injury may extend; how long it may endure; it is impossible for them to say. The least reflection would excite their anxiety and fear, and prevent their ever urging a plea, so absurd and so unwise, in defence of themselves or by way of enticing others, as that which is founded on the supposed inoffensiveness of their conduct. Reflection would make them dread incurring for themselves or entailing on others an injury so extreme and so lasting as that which irreligion and vice threaten and will ultimately inflict.

Another fallacious principle which the ungodly assume and inculcate, is founded on unjust and dishonourable ideas of the character and government of God. God, they say, cannot be injured by their conduct. He cannot be provoked to indignation by any thing which it is in their power to do. He will not be strict

to mark their iniquity. He will make allowance for their frailty and temptation; nor will he involve them and their numerous associates in future woe for indulgences and practices, which have not escaped correction and punishment in the present state. Thus blending truth and falsehood, just and erroneous principles, they encourage and embolden themselves and their companions in vice and impiety. Regardless of the rectitude and holiness of God; in defiance of the displays of those attributes which the gospel and the undertaking of its divine Author exhibit, of the truth of his solemn declarations, and of the power which is able and which is actually engaged to execute them; and whilst they pretend to honour the goodness of God, defeating the purposes of it, and rendering themselves incapable of deriving benefit from it; they lull themselves and their associates into security. They thus speak peace to one another, and indulge a groundless hope, although no truth can be more certain, more conformable to the language of reason and of Providence, and more expressly declared in the book of divine Revelation, than this, that *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, remain for every soul of man that doeth evil*, under the final distribution of justice;

when God *shall reward every man according to his deeds.*

We shall only mention another plea, to which the counsel of the ungodly recurs, and by which they entice the thoughtless and soothe themselves into a dangerous security and peace; and that is, their resolution of evading the evils that threaten the finally impenitent and unrighteous by seasonable reformation and a return to piety and virtue. We ask, they say, no long indulgence. The respite of a few years is the only boon we solicit. The experience accompanying grey hairs will teach us wisdom. Before death attacks us, and the grave opens its gloomy mansion to receive us, we shall repent of the follies of our youth and riper age, make our peace with God, and shield ourselves against danger. We shall, at present, expose the folly of this plea, often exposed, and as often renewed, by merely directing the attention of those who urge it to the progress of vice, delineated and marked in such just characters by the Psalmist in the text: *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.* He who duly considers these successive, connected stages of the sinner's progress, under the influence of the

counsel which he receives from the ungodly, will not, with sanguine expectations and very flattering purposes, look forward to a period of his life, in which, if his life should be prolonged, he will have attained the seat of the scorner.

3dly, *Walking in the counsel of the ungodly* denotes an imitation of their conduct.

This is the natural and unavoidable consequence of associating with them, and adopting their principles and maxims. The pleas we have recited are too absurd to be admitted by any as mere speculations. They are the vain subterfuges of guilt; they are the apologies of persons, determined what course to pursue, and actually pursuing it; and at the same time endeavouring to find out some expedients and to devise some artifices for imposing upon themselves and justifying their conduct. Wisdom and virtue renounce them with scorn. The mind that is capable of admitting them must be already corrupted. They are the refuge of guilt, and they bear evidence of an indefensible course, and of a desperate condition. No man can ever satisfy himself with such counsel, who is not reduced to the sad necessity of availing himself of any plea, which delusion offers: and, therefore, we may con-

clude, that the associates of the ungodly, who pay any regard to such counsel, must already have incurred reproach and blame. Of this, however, we are assured, that in such society it is impossible for them to maintain their integrity and virtue. They will either seek it because they are corrupt; or soon become unprincipled and profligate by recurring to it.

This will appear, if we farther consider—

4thly, That *walking in the counsel of the ungodly* supposes a concern and endeavour to secure their approbation. There can be no intimacy and habitual intercourse without a similarity of disposition and manners; without mutual attachment and complacency. We cannot but wish to render ourselves pleasing to the companions, with whom we delight to associate; and if vice and irreligion form their distinguishing character, we shall necessarily adopt their principles and resemble them in their conduct, that we may become objects of their approbation and confidence. *Can two walk together, except they be agreed?* There can be no cordial society without some degree of reciprocal esteem. It is impossible to hate the treason, whilst we love the trai-

tor, and are admitted into his counsel and confidence.

Once more,

5thly, Those who *walk in the counsel of the ungodly* must ultimately share their doom and punishment. Vice, as well as virtue, forms and cements an attachment, which death will not dissolve. Associates in iniquity will be companions in misery. They are destined for the same abode; they will be sentenced to the same punishment. United in principle and practice by affection and intercourse, in a scene of trial, they will be united, by the doom of their Judge, and the state assigned them, in a world of retribution. Such is the final issue of associating with the ungodly, imbibing their principles, imitating their conduct, and gaining their approbation.

Blessed, then, *is the man, who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly;* who is not misled and perverted by it; who is not precipitated by it into ignominy and ruin. Wisdom warns us to avoid such companions. It addresses its most affectionate and solemn warning to the young and unexperienced. Honest and unsuspecting, they are exposed to peculiar danger. In the choice of their associates, let

them be prudent and cautious. When *sinners entice them*, let them be firm and resolute. Thus prudent and resolute, God will approve and preserve them. With his favour and protection, they will be secure and happy. Amen!

SERMON XV.

THE PROGRESS OF VICE.

PSALM i. 1.

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

IN a former discourse it was observed, that the evident design of the Psalmist in these words is to mark the gradual progress of vice, from the first and lowest stage of degeneracy to the most confirmed state of irreligion and profligacy. He wishes transgressors to consider, whither they are likely to proceed, when they are taking the first wandering step from the path of rectitude and duty; and, therefore, he sets before them, without disguise and without extenuation, the probable consequences of their first error, and the successive steps

of moral depravity and guilt to which it tends, and in which it is likely to terminate. The wisdom of prevention is, in all cases, preferable to that of remedy. Innocence is better than repentance. It is more desirable to avoid the practice of iniquity than to forsake it. These are maxims, which no sophistry can invalidate; which the experience of all ages has confirmed.

The truth and importance of these principles of conduct are incontrovertible, even upon the supposition that it were equally easy to recover our integrity as to maintain it; to regain our lost virtue as to preserve it; and to redress any evil which may be the consequence of folly and vice, as to prevent it. Repentance and reformation, if they were at all times equally in our own power, and sure of succeeding, are only means which the goodness of God and the grace of the Gospel have provided for our obtaining benefits, which would be more easily and more effectually secured by rectitude of conduct. They are attended with pain and labour; and there are some circumstances in which their efficacy, in restoring peace to our own minds and reinstating us in the favour of God, is, to say the least of it, doubtful and hazardous. It is, however, the lot of our present being, that, incapable as

we are of urging the plea of innocence, we must recur to the privilege of repentance, and thankfully accept the offer of pardon on this humiliating condition. Indulged with such a privilege, will any wise man preclude himself from sharing the benefits of it? Will he precipitate himself into circumstances, in which this privilege can be of no avail, and in which he can derive no advantage from it? Unable to stand before God on the ground of innocence, will he render himself incapable of that indemnity and favour which are mercifully connected with repentance and its corresponding fruits? Nevertheless, such is the incapacity which progress in iniquity is likely to incur. Separate from its effects on the transgressor himself, it has an awful aspect on his state in its reference to God. It persists in counteracting designs of mercy, which are adapted to the character and state of the sinner, and which he ought, in duty and gratitude, to accept without obstinacy and without delay.

This is a new view of the danger of increasing degeneracy, which ought to alarm the most thoughtless, and make him fearful of aggravating his offences against God, by continued contempt of his offers of mercy. This is a consideration, which ought to produce

immediate effect on the associate of the ungodly; because the farther he proceeds, the less disposed will he be duly to regard it. The next stage of his progress will render him more insensible of his danger. When *he standeth in the way of sinners,* he will become presumptuous and secure; more determined to persist in a course of folly and vice; more heedless of his safety, and more incapable of being awakened and reclaimed.

The phrase of *standing in the way of sinners,* considered as descriptive of the *second* stage of progress in iniquity, may denote either, that the person who has advanced so far, will be a deliberate and habitual transgressor; or, that he will indulge, to a very culpable and perilous degree, self-confidence and security.

Walking in the counsel of the ungodly in the sense already explained, in a former discourse, or associating with them, adopting their principles, imitating their conduct, and seeking their approbation, has a natural tendency to produce both the effects now mentioned. A person, when he first enters into such society, is thoughtful and timid. Remorse and self-reproach disturb his peace and retard his career. He cannot at once divest himself of those principles and feelings, which are the effects of early culture and the attendants on innocence and virtue. He is a

bashful, trembling, self-convicted transgressor. He is conscious of an antipathy to the course which he is pursuing. What his associates applaud he secretly condemns. He hesitates in yielding to their seductions. He occasionally declines partaking of their guilty pleasures; and does not run with them into the same excess of riot. But repeated acts ripen into habits. Unruly passions gain the ascendancy. Reason and conscience feebly remonstrate; and he gradually disengages himself from those restraints, which he finds, by daily experience, to answer no other purpose besides that of perplexing and disquieting him. Instances of misconduct, that were once the effects of accident more than of design; that proceeded from the sudden attack of an unexpected temptation; that originated more in the seduction of others than in his own inclination and purpose; and that were occasional and infrequent, now become intentional and wilful, deliberate and habitual. He, who once trembled, is now bold. He, who was once reluctant in yielding to his seducers, readily consents, and seeks the temptation which he shunned. He, who was in the rear of a band of licentious associates and followed at a distance and with faultering step, now takes the lead and occupies the foremost rank. He, whose reflections often pained and shamed him,

has now few, if any, intervals of self-condemnation and self-reproach. He, who was once ensnared and deluded by the wiles of others, is become a tempter himself. He *standeth in the way of sinners:* that is, his character is that of a wilful, deliberate, determined sinner; pursuing a course of vice, and inviting and encouraging others to do the same by his counsel and by his example.

What renders the case of the person, whom we are now describing, still more lamentable and hopeless, is the confidence and security to which he seems to have attained. This is evidently implied in the language of *standing in the way of sinners.* Apparently at his ease; undisturbed by remorse and fear; he is insensible of his guilt and unapprehensive of danger.

By examining the principal causes and the common effects of this criminal and perilous security, we shall be furnished with cautions and arguments against it.

The 1st and most obvious cause is heedlessness and inattention. Unaccustomed to serious reflection, and by the company he keeps and the course to which he is devoted, indisposed for it; the associate of sinners can form no just judgment of his character and state. He is equally unapprized of the guilt he contracts and regardless of the danger to which he exposes

himself, by the persevering practice of iniquity. He has no proper sense of the folly and evil of a sinful course; of the disgrace that attends it and of the misery in which it must terminate; of its intrinsic turpitude and pernicious consequences; of its hatefulness to God; and of the injury it does to his own soul. Would he consider either the dignity of his nature or the duration of his existence; the rank assigned him and the duties resulting from it, or the account he must render of his conduct and the interests depending on that account; he could not imagine himself secure in the *way of sinners*. By the constitution of the human mind and by the immutable decree of the sovereign and judge of the human race, anguish, distress, and final ruin must be the portion of all, who obstinately pursue it. The *way of sinners* is the way of ignominy and destruction. It is marked with the tokens of divine indignation. It terminates in perdition and misery.

Can any one, who has not lost the powers of reflection and the feelings of a man; who is not stupefied and hardened to a degree scarcely conceivable; think himself *secure* in this way? Can he continue and proceed in it, without any sense of his folly, and without any dread of his danger? The man, who walks blindfold along the brink of the most steep and lofty precipice:—the

man who slumbers on the only remaining plank of a wreck in the midst of swelling surges and during a raging storm :—the man who exposes himself, unarmed and defenceless, to the assault of an incensed and merciless ruffian, or to the attack of lions and tigers and the most ferocious beasts of prey:—a man, in one or other of these circumstances, is much more secure than the sinner, who is the enemy of God and the object of his displeasure. There is no situation, which the human mind can conceive or the powers of language describe, more perilous and awful, than that of a reasonable and immortal being, hastening to a world of retribution and to a state of misery and despair, and yet unconcerned about his present condition and his future destiny. Can any one in such a situation imagine himself *secure,* without a degree of inattention to his character and his prospects, which is unparalleled by any similar instance of human folly, and which every principle of prudence and interest must condemn? We may well adopt the lamentation of the prophet concerning Israel in its most degenerate state and apply it to the present case; the habitual and self-confident transgressor doth not *know* his danger, because he doth not *consider.* His imagined security can only proceed from ignorance of his state; and he is unacquainted with his situation, because he is

culpably heedless and inattentive. Solitude would awaken reflection; but he avoids it. The admonition of the wise and virtuous would warn him of his danger; but he despises it. The word of divine truth would teach him the folly of his confidence; but he does not consult it. The instructions of the sanctuary would lead him to self-acquaintance and correct his presumption; but he deserts them. Hence it is, that he goes on, disregarding the means of conviction, and *treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath,* and *the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.*

2dly, Another cause of the self-confidence and security of the sinner, in the stage of his progress to which we are now adverting, is that obduracy of temper, that is the natural effect of habitual vice and impiety.

Sensibility of spirit is the attendant and preservation of our virtue. The mind that is not corrupt, is easily susceptible of alarm. The conscience that is tender and faithful, notes and reproves slight errors and transgressions. There is also an awe of God, as a witness and judge, very different from superstitious terror, which checks and restrains the first deviations from the path of duty. But this virtuous sensibility is blunted and deadened by habitual irreligion and vice. God is forgotten; his favour and dis-

pleasure are equally disregarded. Conscience is negligent in performing its office and withholds remonstrances, which are slighted and opposed. The evil and danger of iniquity cease to alarm the progressive sinner. The farther he proceeds, the more is the horror of it diminished; and the greater his guilt, so much the less are his remorse and terror. These are the natural effects of continued and habitual transgressions; evinced by universal experience; to say nothing now of their aggravation, arising from God's withdrawing the suggestions and influence of his holy spirit; and of that blindness of the understanding and hardness of heart, to which, in just displeasure, he may devote the obstinate and persevering sinner.

With such a state of mind it is no wonder, that the licentious and profligate should be insensible of their danger and presume on their own security. Without the awe of God; without the admonitions of conscience; without those views and apprehensions of the evil and danger of sin, which accompany a just abhorrence of it; the practice of it will not be regarded with that horror which it ought to excite; nor will the sinner think his condition so insecure as in truth it is.

3dly, False principles are another ground of the sinner's presumption and imagined security.

Any erroneous notions, that serve to justify himself; to extenuate the guilt of his conduct; to make him easy and fearless in a sinful course; to divest his mind of the awes of futurity and the dread of retribution; or to mitigate and diminish the penalty connected with impiety and vice;—any notions, however groundless and delusive, that will answer these purposes, he will gladly imbibe and cherish; they afford him a relief, which he cannot otherwise obtain; encourage his confidence in a course of sin, and enable him to reconcile the present pleasures or gains of iniquity with an exemption from its future punishment.

It is needless to observe, that every wise man; every man, who has a becoming concern for his own dignity and safety, will be cautious in admitting opinions, that are favourable to vice; that allow licence to the transgressor, and lead him to expect indemnity in the final issue, and escape from merited and threatened condemnation. The end, which opinions of this kind are calculated to serve, and for which they are eagerly embraced, will furnish a suspicion, and, indeed, will afford a strong presumption, that they are fallacious. And the person, who adopts them for such purposes, can have no reason to triumph in his own security. The man, who adapts his creed to his character, and who is licentious in

his principles that he may be licentious in his conduct, is much more likely to embrace error than truth; and the dishonourable motives that actuate him in forming his opinions should lead him to suspect, that they are erroneous and delusive. To say the least of them, they are not a sufficient ground of confidence, nor can they avail him in a season of exigence and distress.

I shall only add,

4thly, That the sinner deceives himself with an imagination of his security by his connection and union with similar associates.

Break their band; detach them from one another; and each of them, singly, will be unable to maintain his confidence, or successfully to delude himself with an idea of his safety. But in the moment, when they associate and unite, they rally their spirits; they embolden each another; they laugh at danger; they assume an air and tone of confidence; and they triumph in their security. Principles, which a solitary sinner is incapable of defending, and which are too doubtful and unsatisfactory to afford him any relief, acquire evidence and produce effect, by means of the union of those who adopt them. By countenancing and encouraging each other, they become fearless and resolute; and they cannot help secretly imagining,

that their number will contribute to their safety. Vain imagination! what combination can prevail against omnipotence? Can any league in *vice* alter its nature? Can any association of mortal men, in defiance of truth, virtue, and happiness, guarded by the wisdom and power of God, expect to prosper? Numbers united in the practice of iniquity, so far from being more secure, will be exposed to the more awful doom.

Such as we have enumerated are the causes of that security which is expressed in the text, by *standing in the way of sinners*. Let us briefly trace its effects. We may observe "that it is peculiarly offensive and provoking to God." As well might a rebel, actually in arms against his lawful sovereign, and avowing unprovoked hostility, expect lenity, as the habitual and obstinate sinner count on his security under the righteous government of God. The idea of security implies a reflection on his holiness and justice; on the rectitude and goodness of his laws; on the authority that supports, and the sanctions that enforce them; and on the truth and power, that are engaged in vindicating them from contempt and punishing transgressors. When a sinner trembles and expresses a dread of the divine displeasure in the violation of his laws, he discovers some symptoms of remaining ingenuity;

he affords some hope of reformation. But self-confidence aggravates his guilt; it betrays a mind unprincipled; a seared conscience; and a callous heart. Almighty God must cease to be what he is; pure, holy, just and true, and even good; regardless of his own authority and law, of the prevalence of virtue, and of the happiness of his creation; if he were capable of beholding a person of this character without abhorrence.

Farther,

"The imagined security of a sinner has a very pernicious influence on his temper and character." It precludes and renders ineffectual every argument that can be used, in order to reclaim him to his duty. Unconscious of guilt, and unapprehensive of danger, what can restrain his progress? what can prevent his increasing obduracy and final ruin? Presuming on his safety, he will proceed from one stage of vice to another, till his recovery becomes almost impossible.

Moreover,

"The presumption and self-confidence of the sinner, will lead him to depreciate and disregard the discoveries and promises of the gospel." Salvation is a joyless sound to a person, who has no sense of his need of pardon; who has no dread of the consequences of his misconduct;

and who has no disposition to *flee from the wrath to come. The whole need not a physician*, says our Saviour, *but they that are sick.* He invites those who *labour* and are *heavy-laden* to come to him, that they may have *rest.* But to declarations of this kind, the sinner, who thinks himself secure, turns a deaf ear. Forgiveness is a blessing, of which he does not feel the want and which he is unanxious to obtain. He depends upon his inattention and obduracy for the precarious peace of mind, which he enjoys: and he has, therefore, no conviction of the value of that tranquillity, which it is the design of Christianity to impart to the troubled spirit. He diverts his views as much as possible from futurity and a state of recompence, and he has, therefore, no desire to secure a happy immortality; nor does he prize the assurance of it, which the doctrine and resurrection of Christ communicate to the upright and obedient. Nay, the strong light which Christianity diffuses over a future world offends and grieves him; and this circumstance, which enhances it most highly in the esteem of the penitent and pious, excites his antipathy and aversion. Thus, the best blessing, which heaven has bestowed on the human race; the most seasonable and the most acceptable gift of God to man; appears to him of no

value, nor is he capable of deriving any advantage from it. How degenerate must that mind be; to what a lamentable state of depravity must it be sunk, which is capable of depreciating and contemning the grace of the gospel!

Once more,

"The present security of the sinner will aggravate his future doom and misery."—The more heedless and unapprehensive he is now of his danger, so much the more awful will be a season of future account and retribution. How tremendous the moment, that will detect the fallacy of his hopes! With what surprise and consternation will he discover, that he has deluded himself with vain notions of his safety; and that the season of escaping the danger, of which he was often warned, and which he disregarded, is irrecoverably past! The remembrance of his groundless security and presumption will enhance the measure of his guilt and the severity of his doom.

There is one reflection, naturally suggested by the subject of this discourse, with which I shall conclude:

How peculiarly unsuitable is that criminal security, which we have endeavoured to expose, both in its causes and in its effects, to the moment-

ary and precarious tenure of human life! Its duration does not warrant the confidence, that is too often reposed in it. It is too great a risk to hazard the interests of the soul and eternity on the uncertain continuance of life. Suspence and delay, in concerns of such moment, and on a foundation so unstable and precarious, are infinitely dangerous: the security of the sinner may be one means of precipitating the awful event, which he wishes to be deferred. But should it be warded off to the most distant moment of his expectation, there is reason to fear, that his confidence will increase, and that the intervening period will pass away, loaded with the guilt of fruitless and unexecuted purposes. Instances too numerous and too awful have occurred, that justify such an apprehension. However, the habitual and progressive sinner should consider, whether life in every renewed moment of it is not the gift of God; and whether *he* has any reason to expect the renewal of a gift, likely to be undervalued and abused? or, if life be prolonged, whether it will find him possessed of dispositions and resolutions duly to improve it? In every view of life, either of longer or more contracted duration, and to us in every stage of it, its duration is uncertain, the security of the sinner is as unwise as it is culpable.

Of this security let us all beware. Like the dead calm, which alarms even the experienced mariner in distant seas, and which portends a storm, it is delusive and dangerous, and is likely to terminate in distress and misery.

SERMON XVI.

THE PROGRESS OF VICE.

PSALM i. 1.

Blessed is the man, that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

No words can more aptly describe the last stage of irreligion and profligacy than those which the Psalmist uses in the latter clause of this verse. The character of the scorner or scoffer, for both these terms are synonymous in the sacred writings, is the highest attainment of impiety and vice; and the phrase of *sitting in the seat of the scornful* exhibits, by the most pertinent allusion that could have been adopted, the self-importance and imagined superiority, as well as the fearless security and triumph,

that have commonly distinguished persons of this character. Exalted, in their own apprehension, above vulgar prejudice and terror, and apparently tranquil and unanxious with respect to their own state, they ridicule the solicitude of others, and treat the principles and practice which religion inculcates with derision and contempt.

Nor is this the effect of some sudden sally of wit and humour in an unguarded moment, when their judgment slumbers and their spirits are unduly elated; or when the errors and follies, sometimes blended with religion, excite their mirth and pleasantry: but it is their deliberate and habitual practice, to which they recur on all occasions, whenever religion arrests their attention. Their raillery is levelled against its most important principles and duties. Its hopes and fears are equally the objects of their contumely and scorn. They resist argument and stifle conviction, by affecting to treat the most serious and interesting subjects with indifference and contempt; and the scoffing humour to which they are addicted and which they habitually indulge, is no less offensive to others than reproachful and pernicious to themselves. A slight view of the disposition and character of such persons is sufficient

to convince us, that they are justly referred by the Psalmist to the last stage of progressive irreligion and vice.

The character of the scorner is not soon nor easily acquired. The sinner begins with resisting and counteracting the conviction of his own mind. He proceeds to renounce principles, that have no influence upon his conduct, because they serve to shame and grieve him; but he cannot surrender them without reluctance, and without a secret suspicion, that they are founded in truth, though they militate against his ease and enjoyment in the course which he is determined to pursue. It requires, however, a much greater degree of degeneracy, even after he has discarded the principles of religion, to render him capable of treating them with scorn and insult. He will be restrained from doing this by a deference to the judgment of those, who believe them; by a remaining sense of their importance and utility; by dread of being accessary to the depravity and misery of others; and by an apprehension on his own account, lest in the ultimate issue they should prove true. Considerations of this kind will have some influence for a long time in preventing him from deriding those sentiments of truth and duty, which he has renounced. There are many connections in civil society; there are

many relations in domestic life; there are many obligations of affection, friendship, and benevolence; separate from all those motives, which a regard to God and futurity suggests, and that can be supposed to have no influence on the mind of the person, concerning whom we are now speaking; which will render him cautious and timid in assuming the character of a scorner. We cannot, therefore, but consider it as an evidence of great degeneracy; of a mind, to a very lamentable degree, depraved and obdurate.

What we farther propose is to enumerate the most common and obvious causes that lead men to scoff at religion, or to treat it with derision and contempt; and then to evince the folly and guilt and pernicious effects of this practice.

Some have recurred to this practice "from mere depravity of mind." Unimpressed by a sense of the importance of the truths and of the obligation of the duties, which religion inculcates, and avowing enmity to both in their general conduct, they have been accustomed to treat them with neglect and contempt. It is natural for men, who resist the influence of religion, and who have no interest in the satisfactions and hopes it administers, to degrade and reproach it. The true value and importance of religion can be justly apprehended only by

those, who imbibe its principles, and conform to the practice which it prescribes. Those who have felt its power, and enjoyed its pleasures, and no others, are capable of forming a proper estimate of its worth and utility. Religion is more a subject of experience than of speculation. A right judgment concerning it requires a refined taste and a virtuous sensibility, without which it will be degraded below its just standard and depreciated below its true value. A depraved mind is a medium, through which it will appear distorted and deformed; obscuring its native excellence and beauty; diminishing its intrinsic importance, and concealing from view its various benefits and pleasures. We need not wonder then, that persons, whose minds are corrupt and vicious, should entertain mean and contemptuous notions of religion; that they should disparage principles, to the evidence and influence of which they are strangers, as of no moment and use; and that they should reproach the practice which it enjoins, as imposing unacceptable and needless restraint, and producing no pleasure and advantage.

Some again addict themselves to the practice of scoffing at religion, "from mere ignorance and stupidity." Determined enemies, they depreciate and revile it in the best manner

they are able; and it is well known, that a jest or sneer supplies with many the want of argument, to which they have no ability to recur. To reasoning they dare not appeal. This is a faculty, to the exercise of which they are incompetent; and, therefore, they wisely avoid it. But they cannot forbear testifying their contempt of religion in that mode, which is most level to their capacities; and nothing is more easy; there is nothing that requires less study and labour, less inquiry and knowledge, than the practice of scoffing at opinions, however true and important, that are held in general estimation. This is a talent, which those, who are disposed to use it, may very readily acquire; without being able to answer a single argument that may be alleged in favour of the principles they deride, or to urge one serious and solid objection against them. As this is the most effectual method of silencing those, who are well informed on the subject of religion, and who will not think it worth their while to repel such attacks otherwise than with indignant contempt; the persons who recur to this practice of scoffing at religion will probably obtain an apparent triumph. But it will be a triumph merely among associates of a disposition and character, similar to their own.

Moreover,

Many have adopted this practice "from self-defence;" or with a view of repelling arguments, from which they apprehended conviction, and of furnishing themselves with pleas for pursuing the criminal course to which they have been devoted. Persons, who can indulge themselves with scoffing at the obligations and sanctions of religion, and who can persuade themselves to think, that they are so trivial and unimportant as to be objects of disdain and ridicule, will become bold and fearless; equally unconscious of guilt and unapprehensive of danger. The seat of the scorner is the only asylum, in the path of vice, secure from remorse and terror. This is the only eminence, in which the sinner can obtain undisturbed tranquillity; and from which he can look down with indifference and contempt, on the prejudices that mislead and the terrors that disquiet the multitude. To this peaceful asylum, to this enviable eminence, he anxiously aspires; and he is happy in the prospect of obtaining a complete triumph over those doubts and fears, which never invade the seat of the scorner.

I add farther,

"Vanity and conceit" have been sometimes the cause of men's scoffing at religion. They

wish to be thought wiser than others; more quick-sighted in discerning vulgar errors; more unbiassed by prejudice in their inquiries; more free in declaring their contempt of prevailing opinions; more resolute in rescuing the mind from those shackles that enslave it; and more elevated in their views and sentiments than the grovelling multitude. To credulity and superstition; to sinister art and worldly policy they ascribe the empire of religion, and the origin and efficacy of the means that are employed to maintain it. They are the men, who have penetration to distinguish between truth and error, and who have honesty and fortitude to attack the prejudices and dispel the fears of deluded and enslaved believers. Triumphing in their superior sagacity and confident of success, they disdain the tedious and laborious method of reasoning; this they leave to those literary drudges who pursue truth by tiresome and painful steps. Wit and humour are the talents in which they excel. Ridicule and satire are the weapons with which they assail that lofty and well-guarded citadel of divine truth, which the wisdom and power of God, and the integrity and learning of ages have rendered impregnable. The boldness of the attempt indicates their vanity and presumption; they assume credit from their impotent attack; and if they

succeed in demolishing outworks, not worth defending, they shout aloud, as if the whole building were falling, and arrogate to themselves the honour of a complete victory.

It is not to the love of truth; it is not to a regard for liberty; it is not to a concern for the dignity of the human mind; and much less is it to a solicitude for the virtue and happiness of the world, that we are to ascribe the efforts of the scoffers to disparage the credit and to impair the influence of religion. Their moving principle is vanity. They are offering sacrifices to their own pride. They are collecting proselytes to admire and extol their own talents; and provided they can accomplish this end, and secure the reputation of sagacity and wit, they are not very anxious about the character of those who applaud them, nor concerned what injury they may do to the minds and morals of their fellow-creatures in obtaining their admiration.

I shall only add, that "scepticism and infidelity" have been too often blended with the crime of scoffing at religion. In the writings and in the conversation of those, who intimate doubts concerning the distinguishing principles of religion, or who openly avow themselves unbelievers, we too frequently discover traces of this scoffing humour. Nor do they always distinguish, as they ought to do, between truth and

error; between the real doctrines of natural or revealed religion, and the mistaken and absurd opinions of mankind. They do not discriminate, as justice and candour require them to do, between the principles of religious truth and duty, as they are suggested by reason and revelation, and those representations of them, that occur in the creeds and forms and practice of the professors of religion.

There are an indecency and an indecorum in the mode of attacking, with scorn and ridicule, even erroneous opinions; especially those which are held in high veneration and esteem by multitudes of believers. Raillery is suited only to more trivial and uninteresting subjects: whereas the conduct of those, who endeavour to make religion ridiculous, and who expose it to derision and reproach, by blending the follies and mistakes of its votaries with important truth, is altogether inexcusable. And yet this practice, however unfair and indefensible, has not been uncommon; and when adopted by such writers as Tindal and Toland, Collins and Bolingbroke, Rousseau and Voltaire, Hume and Gibbon; and when recurred to in the common intercourse and convivial pastimes of social life: it is likely to delude the unwary; to mislead those who have little leisure for reading and reflection; and to produce the most mischievous

effects on the principles and morals of mankind.

What now remains is to evince the folly and guilt of the scorner, and to represent the pernicious influence of his disposition and practice.

The folly and danger of scoffing at religion, or of treating it with derision and insult, will appear, if we consider, that its principles are, in comparison with all others, "the most important and interesting to mankind." That God is our creator and sovereign, our witness and judge; that man is intelligent, accountable, and immortal; that our present conduct will determine our eternal state; that impiety and vice tend, by the constitution of our frame, the established course of nature, and the immutable decree of the Almighty, to infamy and ruin; that holiness and virtue are equally conducive to our dignity and honour, and indispensably necessary to our final acceptance and felicity; and that we can neither escape the evils that threaten the former, nor obtain the blessings connected with the latter, without pursuing that course of repentance and obedience, which the gospel of the Saviour prescribes:—These, and such as these, are the distinguishing principles, which religion inculcates; to which it demands our attention; and which it enforces on our habitual and practical

regard. On the first proposal of them, and previously to any inquiry into their truth, what judgment do we form of them? What sentiments do they excite? Is it a matter of indifference whether we receive or reject them? And whether they have any influence on our temper and conduct? A man must be unaccountably stupid and depraved; his understanding and heart must be strangely perverted; if, on hearing such principles announced to him, he could think them of little or no moment; if he were capable of diverting his attention from them, or of suppressing every degree of solicitude about them. How complicated, how extensive, how durable the interests they involve! The character and destiny of an immortal being are objects of no mean and trivial regard. It is not in the power of language, by any amplification or energy, to add to the importance of the principles, that have been now stated. The proposal of them is, of itself, sufficient to awaken reflection and anxiety in every mind, capable of connecting the ideas of God and man, of duty and happiness, of trial and judgment, of time and eternity.

Are *these*, then, fit subjects of scorn and derision? Can any person, not equally destitute of judgment and feeling, not utterly devoid of common prudence, not dead to all concern about his present and eternal interest, treat them as trifles, not only unworthy of his

serious regard, but deserving of contempt and ridicule? A man must be formed in a different mould from the rest of the human species; he must have a mind of singular construction; he can have no human faculties and passions; if he be capable of sporting with subjects so important and solemn as those that are under our present view.

Placed by these principles, under the eye of God; before the tribunal of a holy, righteous, and all-knowing judge; on the confines of an eternal state, where his condition will depend upon his present conduct; no person, that is not bereaved of the powers of reflection, can allow himself to scoff at and deride them.

But the practice of the scoffer will appear still more absurd and culpable, if we consider, that these principles are "no less credible than important." If the evidence attending them were much less convincing than it is; if it were counterbalanced by difficulties and objections much more numerous than any which have yet been urged; their singular importance furnishes a plea in their favour, entitles them to attention, notwithstanding some doubt concerning their truth, and ought to secure them from contempt and scorn. A person who believes them without sufficient evidence acts a much wiser part than he who, on this account, rejects them with dis-

dain. In a case of moment, when events of uncertain issue are depending, prudence requires us to prepare for consequences that are possible, and much more for those that are probable, though there may be some reason to apprehend, that the consequences which are expected may not occur. If, therefore, the evidence in favour of the principles and prospects of religion, amounted to nothing more than this:—the scoffer is utterly without excuse. Deriding the *principles* of piety and virtue, he is led to neglect that attention to his *conduct,* which, in circumstances that may possibly and even probably occur, will be his only security. How much more foolish and reprehensible is the scoffer, upon the supposition that the principles of religion are founded in truth and nature, and that they are confirmed by an evidence, which no wise man can reasonably reject! How comprehensive and satisfactory this evidence is, our time and the limits of this discourse will not allow us to specify. But admitting that there is a God of infinite perfection; that he governs the world in righteousness; that he expects homage and obedience from his rational offspring, whom he has formed for virtue, and designed for immortality; and that he will judge mankind and assign them their future portion according to their present conduct:—Admitting

these principles, as capable of the most convincing proof, and liable to no objection that can invalidate or impeach their truth, the seat of the scorner is an eminence of folly and guilt. Insecure and perilous is the present condition, and awful will be the final doom of those, who, in defiance of means of conviction furnished by their own faculties, the frame of nature, and the explicit testimony of divine revelation, not only deny, but deride, those sacred truths, which are no less beneficial in their practical influence, than as sources of consolation and hope amidst the trials of time and in the prospect of eternity.

What injury the scorner does both to himself and others, few words will be sufficient to shew. If there be any mind, which counsel cannot penetrate; which argument cannot convince, and on which we must despair of making any salutary impression; it is that of the person, who indulges a habit of scoffing at religion; of ridiculing the most serious subjects and of deriding the most awful. There is no obstinacy so invincible, there is no obduracy so impenetrable as those of the scorner. And there is no degree of guilt, in the register of human follies and crimes, more atrocious and more aggravated than that of the man, who, unrestrained by the awe of God and futurity, treats the

name and worship, the authority and government, the laws and institutions, the promises and threatenings of the supreme sovereign and judge, with contempt and ridicule. If there be any punishment, more signal and severe than every other, it must be reserved for him, who now *sitteth in the seat of the scorner.*

More especially if we consider the injury, which a person of this character does to the honour of religion, to the influence of virtue, and to the happiness of mankind. There is nothing which men generally dread more, and are more anxious to avoid, than contempt. There is a pride in human nature which cannot bear insult. Hence it has happened, that ridicule has been more successful in dispossessing men of their religious principles than reasoning. *That* integrity and fortitude, which arguments have failed to vanquish, have not been able to maintain themselves against raillery and derision. Whatever be the cause, the fact is unquestionable. Scoffers have been the most dangerous enemies to the principles and practice of religious virtue; and they have been peculiarly mischievous in their influence on youthful minds. Unfurnished with the shield of knowledge and experience, they have had no means of resistance and of self-defence. And persons of mature age and more established virtue must

have trembled, when they have occasionally observed what effects have been produced by the raillery of the licentious and profane; or even by the unseasonable and very unjustifiable ridicule of those, whose invincible vanity will suffer them to omit no opportunity of displaying their wit and humour. A habit of jesting on serious subjects is much more pernicious than those who indulge it may be ready to apprehend: and when it degenerates into the unpardonable practice of scoffing at religion, on almost every occasion when the subject occurs; it cannot fail to encourage licentiousness of principle and depravity of temper and conduct. As the person described by Solomon, *who casteth about him firebrands, arrows, and death,* so is the scoffer, who *deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, am I not in sport?*

Against this complication of folly and guilt, those who hear me need no caution. Accustomed to venerate religion, and to respect its authority and institutions, they are in no danger of ascending the *seat of the scorner.* Having acquired and maintained just notions of the importance of religious principles and the obligation of religious duties; let them persevere in testifying their regard for religion and their concern for its increasing influence, by their counsel and their example. In the variable life

of man circumstances must arise in which its importance and utility will be brought to the test of experience. Such, perhaps, may already have been the case with regard to some of us. It has probably been our solace in affliction; and we have derived from it succour and consolation, which the world has been unable to afford us. But for full conviction, that religion deserves not the scorn and contempt of its enemies, and that it will justify the most ardent approbation and attachment of its sincere votaries, we must wait for the great teacher death, and a succeeding season of judgment and retribution. In the mean while let us *hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering;* and may it be daily more and more our interest, that the principles of religion should be true, and that the hopes with which it inspires us may be fully accomplished! Amen.

SERMON XVII.

THE FOLLY AND DANGER OF PROCRASTINATION AND DELAY.

Acts, xvii. 32.

And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; and OTHERS SAID, WE WILL HEAR THEE AGAIN OF THIS MATTER.

The Apostle Paul well knew, how to adapt the subject and mode of his address to the genius and disposition of his auditors. In his discourse at Athens, where learning and religion were held in very general estimation, he pursues that kind of reasoning, which was most likely to engage the attention of his hearers, and to convince them of the truth and importance of the principles, which he wished to inculcate. He begins, not as our translation has very erroneously expressed it, by charging them

with an excess of superstition; for this would have tended more to exasperate than to conciliate them: but by commending what he observed to be laudable in their conduct. *Ye Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are* "very devout or religious," for so the word, which we have rendered *too superstitious*, ought to have been translated. Amongst other numerous emblems of their devotion, he had observed *an altar, inscribed to the unknown God.* He proceeds to give them just views of the attributes and character of this Being whom they *ignorantly worshipped;* and having evinced their absolute dependance upon him, and confirming it by a citation from one of their own poets, with whose writings they were supposed to be well acquainted; he deduces, from their relation to him, as his offspring, the acknowledgment, which was his due, and the account, which they must render of their conduct to him, as their moral sovereign and judge. He thus leads them, by a very obvious and easy train of argument, from the existence and providence of God, to a period of judgment and a state of future retribution. But to this inference none of their speculations had been ever able, with any certainty, to attain. For satisfactory evidence on a subject, with respect to which human inquiry had advanced no farther than to conjecture and

presumption, it was necessary to recur to the discoveries of revelation; and those discoveries the Apostle was now prepared to communicate. Thus gently and gradually, without alarming their prejudices, and availing himself of principles, that were generally acknowledged, though not sufficiently understood, does the Apostle pave the way for disclosing to them the chief doctrine and fundamental fact of Christianity. *God hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.* But very different from what might have been expected; very little corresponding to the precaution that had been used; and very unsuitable to the eloquence of the Apostle's address, was the effect which it produced upon his audience. *The resurrection of the dead,* whatever notion they might have of a future existence in general, was a novelty at which they startled. *When they heard of this, some mocked,* treated it with scorn and insult; *and others,* of a better disposition, *said, we will hear thee again of this matter.* The doctrine and the fact, which the Apostle had announced, were too important to be treated either with insult or with indifference; with a profane scoff or a procrastinating neglect. And yet, similar

to this, however unjustifiable, has been the treatment, which the doctrines and duties of religion in general have met with from the licentious or the unthinking. Whilst some, with an obduracy, which can plead no excuse, have derided every religious obligation, and converted every argument that enforces it into an occasion of ridicule;—thus depreciating in their own estimation, what is intrinsically important, and shielding themselves from reflections, which would fill them with remorse and terror:—Others, less bold and hardened, have contented themselves with dismissing, only for a season, that attention to truth and duty, which they are determined to resume on a future occasion.

With persons of the former description reasoning would be of little avail; and, I thank God, any mode of address adapted to the disposition of such persons would, in this place, be needless. It would be needless, in any other view of it, than as a caution to those, who are at present far enough removed from this extreme of folly and profaneness, and as a means of confirming them in their just abhorrence of it. But the character of those, who divert their attention from religious truth and duty, with the purpose and the prospect of more effectually regarding them at some future period, is more common. It betokens a state of mind, not

totally corrupted, much less become obdurate. Good principles have some influence, though not sufficient to form a decided character. Persons of this class invite and encourage the efforts of counsel and warning; and in addressing them with the admonitions of prudence, success is far from being hopeless. But suspence is culpable and delay is dangerous. The purpose that is deferred becomes gradually more feeble and irresolute. The voice that now replies with a firm and determined tone to the counsel of wisdom, *we will hear thee again of this matter,* will hesitate and faulter. The time will soon come, when those who have often repeated this unavailing and ineffectual plea, will find it impossible to deceive themselves any longer. In order to guard against this evil;—an evil no less common than pernicious;—the evil of delay in what concerns our duty and happiness: I shall lead those, who are in danger of being thus seduced and betrayed into a continued neglect or violation of their duty, to consider:—what disingenuity and ingratitude—what presumption and self-confidence—and what extreme and inexcusable folly, are justly chargeable upon such conduct.

The apology of delay, which is expressed in the text and which has been often adopted by heedless and irresolute transgressors, is seductive and

ensnaring. It is urged as a plea, not for continued impenitence; for that never enters into the contemplation of those who adopt it; but for deferring what they know it is their duty and interest to regard:—and this they do with a full purpose of remedying and preventing any evil, that may result from their procrastination. The object of their determination is amendment and obedience. Their purposes are virtuous and laudable. They claim the merit of their good intentions. They are thus led to imagine, that their delay in executing them is rendered excusable, if not altogether venial, by the resolution which they profess to form. By degrees, they acquire a habit of renewing their purposes and repeating their violation of them. They amuse and flatter themselves with the notion, that they are less culpable and more secure than heedless and determined transgressors. This vain imagination betrays them into great danger; if not into absolute ruin.

As a caution against delay, let it then be considered,

1st, What disingenuity and ingratitude are manifested by purposes often renewed and as often violated.

The benefit of good counsel and of the just sentiments produced by it is too obvious to need illustration. Happy are they who possess

this double advantage; who are not only admonished, but convinced of the evil and danger of sin, and of the wisdom and obligation of a virtuous and religious conduct! Such is the case of those, who, in consequence of their own reflection or the advice of others, resolve to amend what is culpable in their practice, and to perform their neglected duty. Their good resolution implies previous knowledge and conviction. It supposes their state to be essentially different from that of those, who are ignorant and unthinking; who are neither instructed nor admonished; who neither know nor consider the evil they pursue and the good they neglect. Those who defer the execution of their good purposes are, therefore, chargeable with the guilt of counteracting the counsel they receive from others, and the conviction of their own minds. They are constrained to make one virtuous effort, which their intention and resolution imply; and yet by failing to accomplish what they so well intended; by violating the purpose so wisely formed; and by returning to the culpable practice, which they, in design, abandoned; they incur a degree of reproach and blame which, all circumstances considered, exceeds that of the ignorant and degenerate. *To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.* This knowledge

lies at the foundation of every good purpose we form, and, of course, aggravates the violation of it. For this knowledge we are ultimately indebted to the all-disposing providence of God; and to act inconsistently with it; to resist those motives to a prudent and virtuous conduct, which we derive from it; and after deliberating and determining well, to fail in fulfilling;—to thwart and defeat, and render ineffectual, our own intentions and engagements, must, therefore, be disingenuous and ungrateful. Placed in circumstances more advantageous than others; more favourable to just and serious reflection; led to propose to ourselves and to determine on pursuing the course, which true wisdom prescribes, and which our own best interests require;—and yet to recede in the midst of all the light that surrounds us, and that shews us our real situation; and to counteract the sentiments, which we have adopted and professed;—this kind of conduct is as ungrateful to God and to those who have instilled good principles into our minds, and administered to us salutary counsel, as it is unwise with regard to ourselves.

Besides, there is another point of view, in which the ingratitude and disingenuity of such conduct may be exhibited. In deliberating and resolving, we entertain the hope, that God will

forgive our past transgressions, and accept our future obedience. It is under this conviction, that we delay the execution of our good purposes, and look forward to some future opportunity of accomplishing them. We rely for a season of this kind, and for all the benefits, which it is our intention to derive from it, on the forbearance and goodness of God; and yet by ineffectual purposes, we insult and provoke that long-suffering and mercy, on which we found our hopes. It is the language of such conduct: "The mercy of God is our ultimate refuge; but it is yet too soon to recur to it. We will multiply our offences, in hope of obtaining pardon. We will seek favour from the Almighty, when other sources of real or imaginary happiness fail us. We will devote our health and strength; the prime and vigour of our years and of our talents, to purposes, which he has prohibited and which tend to dishonour his authority and law. When we have pursued this course as long as we are capable of deriving any pleasure or profit from it, we will surrender the residue of our powers and opportunities to his service:—not doubting that, as he is merciful, he will pardon and accept us."

To state such conduct is to expose it. Let the delaying transgressor duly consider, how ungrateful and disingenuous it appears, when

stripped of all the darkness and disguise in which, for his own peace and honour, he wishes to involve it; and he will think of it with just abhorrence.

When God condescends by his providence, or his word, to invite and urge him to forsake sin and practise righteousness, he will not hesitate and demur. He will not be so dead to all sense of obligation as to defer complying with so reasonable a demand. He will not be so disingenuous as to indulge even the thought or surmise: *I will hear thee again of this matter;* and render precarious and, perhaps, unavailing, all his future hopes of mercy, by refusing the favour that is now offered.

Another consideration that serves to expose every kind of delay in the concerns of religion and virtue, is the unwarrantable presumption and self-confidence on which it is founded. *What is our life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away.* Could we assign any future period, in which we should think and act more wisely than we do now, what security have we, that such a period will ever arrive to us? If we defer the important work, which God hath given us to do, to the imbecility and decay; to the gloom and inactivity of advanced age:—and this is the time of leisure and of pressing necessity to

which too many transfer the most interesting concerns of life;—upon what ground do we expect to attain it? The strength of our animal frame; the prudence and temperance of our conduct; the longevity of our family; and a variety of other circumstances, on which we may form our expectations, are very insufficient and fallacious grounds of dependance. It is needless to represent the awful uncertainty of our being thus privileged; and one would hope, that it is equally needless to warn any against the hazard which a dependance of this kind is likely to incur. But in the decline of life, and amidst a thousand infirmities, corporeal and mental, that are often the attendants on this period, and the harbingers of approaching dissolution, there are few, who will be duly qualified, either for conducting aright the affairs of this life or making any preparation for another. Religion is a concern of such extent and magnitude, and connected with so many important interests, that it is not likely to be properly regarded, when the attention to it commences at this late period. We shall then much more need the consolations and hopes, which it is fitted to administer, than be suitably disposed to correct the errors of a long life, and to discharge duties and obligations that have been habitually neglected.

But we may, possibly, bound our views within more narrow limits, and expect a period of leisure and inclination appropriate to the purposes of religion and virtue, at a short interval. Nevertheless, of that period, however near in prospect, and however speedily it may arrive, we have no certain and unalienable tenure. To us, beset on every side with diseases and accidents, with dangers and death, it may never come. Should it arrive, it will be loaded with cares and expose us to trials, which may require our whole attention; which may employ us as busily as we are now employed; and which may afford us as little leisure as we now enjoy. But shall we then be different beings than we are now? Shall we have other sentiments and views? Shall we be less disposed to procrastinate and delay? Shall we be more steady to our purposes? Shall we be more faithful and more active in the execution of them? Or, shall we then be as ready to resolve as we are now? Perhaps, in the lapse of years; in the change of circumstances; and in consequence of the neglect of fulfilling past engagements, we may experience a change of disposition. Our sense of the obligation and importance of religious virtue may be less lively than it is now. Our apprehension of danger in a forbidden course may be stifled and

deadened:—our attachment to it strengthened:—our difficulty in disengaging ourselves from it increased:—our moral powers of exertion enfeebled;—and our hope of divine succour more doubtful and wavering. Should all or any of these circumstances occur; and that they have occurred in other instances experience will sufficiently testify; the good we proposed to ourselves in the prospect of that period, to which we have been directing our views, and on the arrival of which we founded our dearest hopes, may be utterly unattainable: or the attainment of it may be subject to greater risk and difficulty than it is now.

It is not merely the duration of life, that renders the execution of our good purposes precarious. The state of our own minds, and the situation in which we may be placed, equally deserve consideration. Our sentiments and views, our affections and inclinations very much depend on our external circumstances. Should these be materially altered in the progress of our years, and before that period arrives, to which we look forward with fond expectation; should our health and strength be unimpaired; should our outward condition be easy and prosperous; should new accessions of wealth, or honour, or influence, bind us, by stronger ties, to time and the world; should our prospects

be bright and unclouded, and appearances indicate stability and duration to every temporal enjoyment; should we, by the most deplorable of all calamities, in a moral and religious view, by unfavourable connections and by the alarming prevalence of infidelity and indifference, be seduced to surrender our principles and to adopt a licentious creed:—there is little probability that we should either resolve well or execute any virtuous purpose we may happen to form. A habit of delay, like other habits, is established by frequent recurrence, and, in process of time, becomes obstinate and invincible. Some have had occasion to regret, in maturer or more advanced life, that they had not taken advantage of their first resolutions, and that they deferred acting upon them, till they have become too feeble and destitute of energy to produce any valuable and permanent effect.

After all, what reason have we to imagine that God will always wait to be gracious; that there is no limit to his forbearance; and that there are no circumstances to which transgressors may arrive, in which it is neither consistent with justice nor with the views of supreme wisdom and goodness, to grant them indemnity and pardon? There is, as we have already seen, an aggravation of guilt in the repeated violation of good purposes. To what

degree it may be offensive to God, and how far it may render those who are chargeable with it unfit objects of forgiveness, it is not for us absolutely to pronounce. But of all persons, the delaying sinner has peculiar reason to be apprehensive on his own account, and to dread the irreconcileable displeasure of the Almighty, whose forbearance he has so often slighted and abused.

Upon the whole, there is no ground for that self-confidence; there is no justifiable plea for that presumption, which lead men to expect much benefit from purposes, the execution of which is repeatedly and habitually deferred. From the duration of life; from the state of their own minds; from the external circumstances, in which they may be placed; and from the mercy of God, ever exercised in harmony with wisdom, holiness, and justice, we can deduce no sufficient warrant for encouraging, and much less for emboldening, the hope of those, who from time to time defer the most important concerns of their being to an uncertain futurity. When wisdom addresses them with admonitions to forsake every evil way and to devote themselves to the service of God, and the practice of virtue, it argues a presumption, which has no solid foundation, to reply: *We will hear thee again of this matter.*

Who are they that use this language of confidence and security? Creatures, *whose breath is in their nostrils* and who *are crushed like the moth;* who fade like the flower of the field and wither as the leaf of autumn; whose disposition is as fluctuating and inconstant as the condition of their being; who have as little reason to depend upon themselves as upon their external circumstances; and who, so far from having any claim on the forbearance of God, have ground to fear, that he will deprive them even of the residue of their years. With such beings and in such circumstances, how groundless and unjustifiable must be the presumption, that trifles with present opportunities of being virtuous and happy, and risks the soul and eternity on the precarious chance of futurity!

3dly, We ought to consider, what extreme and inexcusable folly is chargeable upon such conduct. If delays were less criminal in their nature and less dangerous in their issue than they are; there is a distinct and independent view of them, which will be sufficient to evince the folly of those, who are in the habit of recurring to them. Suppose the period certain, to which they defer the performance of their acknowledged duty, and let it arrive with every advantage accompanying it, which they can desire; they lose by their delay much more

than they can gain. They deprive themselves of the honour and satisfaction, which attend the execution of virtuous and laudable purposes, and suffer the anguish of remorse and self-reproach. They defer being virtuous and happy. They forego the tranquillity and hope, connected with the testimony of conscience and a sense of the favour of God: and they act against the conviction and determination of their own minds, as if they thought it too soon to assert and maintain the true dignity of their nature, and to secure the chief felicity of their existence. They resolve to be virtuous and happy at some future period; but the commencement of true happiness they delay. They say by their conduct; "We will not *now* enjoy the good, of which we are capable, and which it is our purpose to secure. We will depreciate its value, imbitter its sweetness, and unfit ourselves for the enjoyment of it, before we seek the possession of it: and in the mean while, we will pursue a course, from which we must recede, of which we shall repent, and from the consequences of which we shall find it difficult to escape."

But this is only part of the folly chargeable upon delaying transgressors. In the interval that elapses before their good resolutions, in their own estimation, are to take effect, they are liable to many vicissitudes and trials, for which

the principles of religion, influencing their temper and practice, would furnish the most desirable antidote; which these principles, enlightening the judgment, sanctifying the heart, elevating their views to God, and extending their prospects to futurity, would alleviate: and during the continuance of which they would administer the choicest consolation and relief. And should they, at any time, in their own apprehensions, be assaulted suddenly and unexpectedly by the king of terrors, they would even then be secure and happy; tranquil and in a great degree fearless, under a conviction, that they were at peace with God, and that their eternal interests were unalienable and inviolate. Of these benefits delay deprives those, who are deluded by it. Not only destitute of the satisfactions and hopes which religion administers in circumstances of trial, their unexecuted purposes would be painful in recollection. They would occur to their imagination like so many angry spectres, aggravate every other occasion of sorrow and suffering, and distress their minds with remorse and terror.

These are not ideal speculations. A season of affliction and the alarm of approaching dissolution have often presented them to notice, as real as they are awful.

Besides, when the period of executing de-

ferred purposes arrives, doubt and fear will render it gloomy and joyless. Nor will those, who are secure and happy with regard to their final destiny, soon or easily acquire that composure and tranquillity, that conscious integrity and that confidence of hope, on which the self-possession and felicity of the closing scenes of life very much depend. Whilst the Apostle Paul speaks honourably of some, who *were in Christ* or Christians, before him, he abases himself and bewails his own case, as *one born out of due time*. Similar instances of self-humiliation and diffidence have often occurred; and distressing apprehensions have more or less disturbed the peace and darkened the prospects of those, who have deferred the execution of their good purposes to advanced or declining life.

I shall only add, that persons of this description, attaining to a less established and exemplary character than others, who have adhered to their virtuous resolutions through a long period of exercise and trial, must expect to be less distinguished at the resurrection of the just; and to participate an inferior rank of honour and degree of happiness in that state, where *one star differeth from another star in glory.*

Enough has been said to expose the folly of delay in concerns of infinite and eternal moment; and to evince the wisdom of serious de-

liberation, vigorous resolution, and an immediate execution of every good purpose we form. If any of us have been irresolute and undetermined in a concern of such importance as that which pertains to our virtue and happiness, let us hesitate and waver no longer. This is not a case which requires or which admits of long suspence and delay. A mind, free from prejudice and passion, cannot judge erroneously. It cannot mistake its duty and true interest. It cannot remain, without blame and reproach, for a long time undecided.

If any of us have been negligent and remiss in the execution of our good purposes, let that recollection, which reproves our past neglect, incite us to immediate action. Let us not wait for farther counsel and warning. Before we have an opportunity of *hearing again of this matter*, our condition or our disposition may render admonition, should we be in circumstances to receive it, unavailing.

To those, whose resolutions and conduct correspond, and may we not hope that we are addressing many of this character? We shall direct the exhortation of the apostle: *Be stedfast, unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord; for as much as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.*

SERMON XVIII.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ADAPTING THE TEMPER TO THE CONDITION.

PHILIPPIANS, iv. 12.

I know both HOW TO BE ABASED, *and I know how to abound: every where, and in all things, I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and suffer need.*

THE example of the apostle, here presented to our view, affords instruction, adapted to the various circumstances of human life: and it is peculiarly recommended to our notice by aiding us in the regulation of our temper and conduct, amidst the changes and transitions, to which the precarious course of present events exposes us. Health and sickness, pain and pleasure, success

and disappointment, security and danger, are separated by such slender partitions; the lights and shades of human life are so intermixed and blended, and they run into one another by such imperceptible gradations;—in other words, the condition of man is so mutable and inconstant, and liable to so many unexpected and sudden variations, that true wisdom requires us always to be prepared for any occurrence that may happen. The more sudden the changes to which we are subject, so much the more likely we are to be off our guard; and so much the more necessary, that we should possess some great principles, the influence of which, by being habitual, will secure us from surprise; from being unduly elated by events, that are favourable and prosperous, or unduly depressed by those, that are unprosperous and adverse. It is needless to observe, that the tranquillity of our minds does not always nor principally depend on great and signal occurrences. The progress of these is commonly slow and perceptible, and affords us opportunity for preparation. We are often most affected, and in the greatest danger of losing possession of ourselves, by events, which are inconsiderable in themselves, but which happen suddenly and without previous warning. It is, therefore, of great importance, that we

should acquire the art, practised by the apostle and recommended by his example; and *know both how to be abased and how to abound.*

The profession of the writer, the time in which he lived, and the difficulties, with which he struggled, afforded him the most frequent opportunities of adapting his temper to an abased and suffering condition; and his example imparts instruction to a very considerable class of mankind in every age and nation. Those who occupy subordinate stations and whose humble sphere of life exposes them to numerous trials, claim peculiar attention. Their situation, in a variety of respects, excites sympathy; and their importance to society loudly demands and amply justifies every attempt to render them virtuous and happy. On their virtue and happiness, the order and prosperity of every civil community chiefly depend; and it is the excellence of Christianity that, with a condescension and benignity, worthy of the wisdom and philanthropy of its divine author, it adapts its instruction and consolation to their circumstances. The principles of piety which it inculcates and the conduct which it prescribes, are calculated to make them useful and happy. It exalts their rank and extends their views; and by the prospect of a period, which shall annul every outward distinction, and in which no dif-

ference of condition shall remain, but that which virtue and piety establish, it disposes them to acquiesce in the temporary state which Providence has assigned them.

But the utility of *knowing how to be abased* is not confined to those, who are in the lower stations of life. The world is a scene of general vicissitude. Health and ease, honour and affluence, are precarious blessings; and there are various ways, in which Providence claims and exercises the prerogative of abasing mankind. Disappointment and affliction, in one form or other, and at one period of life or another, are the heritage of mortality; and those are the most happy, to whom it is meted out in the smallest proportion. To *know how to be abased* is a lesson, which all, without a privilege of exemption that does not belong to human nature and to human life, will have occasion to practise, and which prudence, therefore, should constrain them to learn.

What we farther propose is to inquire, wherein this knowledge consists; whence it derives its importance; and how it may be acquired.

As in an abased condition there are evils to be avoided and duties to be performed, peculiar to such a condition; the knowledge, which we are now to illustrate, includes an acquaintance

with both these; with the evils to be shunned, and the duties to be practised.

One evil, which abasement sometimes produces, is murmur against Providence. Those who do not allow themselves to *speak unadvisedly with their lips,* or to arraign the justice and goodness of the supreme sovereign, indulge repining thoughts, equally cognizable to omniscience, and injurious to their own peace and comfort. Disappointed in some favourite pursuit, flattering expectations, or misplaced confidence; struggling, with unsuccessful application, against the tide to which the course of events is subject; betrayed by false friends, or calumniated by open enemies; or labouring, without prospect of relief, under acute pain or tedious decay; they have been prone to charge God foolishly; to suspect him of inattention or unkindness, if not of partiality and injustice, in his providential dispensations, and even to question the reality of his overruling direction and agency. "Would a righteous and benevolent Providence," they are ready to say, or at least to think, "suffer industry to toil without effect, defeat the exertions of skill and activity, permit fraud, deceit and violence to prosper; or exercise a frail, dependent being, whose whole existence is, at best, momentary and pre-

carious, with painful and tedious disorders?" Thus partial to themselves, magnifying their own interests, inattentive to the boundless plan of providence, and regardless of the ultimate tendency and issue of every present occurrence; they are apt to cavil and complain, to entertain unfavourable thoughts of God, and to dispute the rectitude and goodness of his administration.

How vain and groundless! How useless and pernicious, are all such suspicions and complaints! A person, who *knows how to be abased,* will be careful to avoid them.

Farther,

An abased and suffering condition is sometimes attended with discontent, fretfulness and impatience. The minds of persons, on whom the world frowns, or who suffer in their persons, property, or reputation, are easily discomposed. Their temper is irritable. Their tranquillity is disturbed, and their self-possession interrupted by slight and trivial occurrences. Great allowances ought to be made for the situation of such. They *claim* the attention of sympathy, the forbearance of friendship, and the candour of compassion. But if they would enforce their claim and secure the indulgence and lenity which their case demands, they should be careful to avoid that peevish, splenetic humour,

which renders them less amiable to those that are about them, and makes every office of duty and affection unpleasant and unacceptable. Those who are unaccustomed to disappointment and affliction; who are seldom exercised with pain and trouble; and whose uninterrupted health, ease and prosperity have made them forget, that they are mutable and mortal, are most in danger of indulging a froward, fretful, impatient temper, when the evil, of which they had no apprehension, occurs. They should, therefore, foresee their danger before it arrives, and guard against the injurious effects arising from any possible change of circumstances, before the change takes place.

It is not merely any great calamity or affliction, that produces a discontented and repining temper; but we are at the mercy of inconsiderable evils. Some trivial accidents will ruffle and disturb the mind, that is not previously instructed in the art, recommended in the text: and, therefore, the acquisition of it should interest the attention of persons in every condition; of the affluent and prosperous as well as of the children of affliction and sorrow.

Moreover,

As those, who are abased and afflicted, are in danger of murmuring against Providence and of repining at their own condition; they are

no less exposed to the baneful influence of envy, when they consider the condition of others more easy and prosperous than themselves. Pride and self-love are too apt, in all cases, to look with a jealous and envious eye on the pre-eminence of others. Little distinctions are often the occasions of great uneasiness. Envy is excited, not so much by the superior rank of those, who are very far exalted above ourselves; as by those more inconsiderable differences of condition that take place amongst persons, setting out in life with similar prospects, or occupying the same or similar talents and station. The painful, pernicious influence of this passion is more frequently owing to imaginary distinction, than to any real difference in the means either of reputation or enjoyment. But whatever be the sources from which it springs, its effects are reproachful and injurious; and it ought to be vigilantly shunned. If we *know how to be abased,* we shall not fret and repine, and be uneasy on account of the eminence of others;—an eminence, which, perhaps, with all its attendant circumstances, may be more justly the object of commiseration than of envy:—an eminence, which, probably, we ought to congratulate ourselves for not attaining, and which may be less eligible in the judgment of prudence, than even the humble and afflicted state,

which Providence assigns to ourselves. However, as we cannot avoid comparing our own situation with that of others, and deploring the distress and disappointment which *we* may be ordained to suffer, whilst *they* are easy and prosperous, it is the more necessary, that we should learn to *rejoice with them who rejoice,* and to acquiesce in our own condition without envying that of others.

We may add,

That those who *know how to be abased,* will not recur to any dishonourable and unlawful methods of extricating themselves from the distress which they endure. With them it will be a sacred maxim, "It is better to suffer than to sin." They will dread poverty and affliction less than guilt; and *count it a small thing to be judged of man's judgment;* to be reproached by others; whilst they maintain their own integrity and approve themselves. If they are in difficulties, they will not disembarrass themselves by the violation of any principles of justice or of honour. If they are in affliction, however tedious and severe, they will not release themselves in defiance of the great law of nature, which forbids their deserting even a painful post of duty, and requires their *waiting all the days of their appointed time,* till the Author of their being permits their discharge.

Such as we have now briefly recited are the evils to be avoided in a state of abasement and distress. There are also duties to be performed, which no less demand our attention.

The first we shall mention is a devout acknowledgment of the rectitude and goodness of divine Providence. Whatever be the occasion or the means of our humiliation and suffering, we should bow with reverence to the will of God, and say with pious Eli, in a case of peculiar distress: *It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good!* or with our divine Saviour, in circumstances of accumulated reproach and anguish: *Not my will, O Father, but thine be done!* It is from sentiments of piety in lively exercise, that we shall derive support and consolation in a season of trouble. We can never be sufficiently acquainted with the lesson of the text, nor practise it in its full extent, unless our minds are possessed with just and honourable apprehensions of the all-directing and overruling Providence of God. Secondary causes are the instruments of his agency. *Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.* The dominion of the almighty sovereign over all events we should devoutly acknowledge. His wisdom we should venerate. In his power and goodness we should confide.

Such sentiments will naturally produce acquiescence and submission. Against the power of God, resistance would be vain. Against the counsel of his wisdom, it would be imprudent. Against the designs of his goodness, it would be ungrateful. Resignation to the will of God must, therefore, appear to be equally our interest and duty; an act of piety towards God, and of wisdom in its reference to our own satisfaction and comfort.

With this temper we shall be led to consider the ends and uses to which the severer discipline of Providence is subservient. We shall seek the succour which a merciful God is ready to impart, and be solicitous to derive from our afflictions the benefits, with a view to which we are exercised with them. We shall also cultivate that humility and meekness; that gentleness and patience, that trust and hope, with respect to their beneficial effect and final issue, which will conduce equally to our *improvement* and our *happiness*, whilst they are continued.

Again, a due sense of the dominion and agency of divine Providence will encourage every exertion of prudence, activity, and industry, of which our situation admits, and which may be likely to accomplish our rescue from the evils, by which we are oppressed.

Besides, those who *know how to be abased,* know how to maintain that self-possession and vigour of mind, which will facilitate and promote their deliverance, if it be practicable, or conduce to their tranquillity under sufferings, that are incapable of being removed: and the temper they cultivate entitles them to the peculiar concurrence and succour of the supreme Sovereign of nature.

We shall only add, under this head, that persons of the disposition and character now described will direct their views and pursuits to the rest and recompence which are promised to the upright and obedient. From the prospect of a period of release, and of ample retribution, rendered familiar in their solitary and musing moments, they will derive motives to persevere in their faith, patience, and submission; and persuaded, that though they *now sow in tears, they shall reap in joy,* they will not *faint nor grow weary in their minds.*

Let us now proceed to evince the importance of the knowledge, which we have endeavoured to illustrate.

How much it will conduce to our tranquillity and enjoyment must be evident from what has been already delivered. How necessary it is that we should secure our happiness in this

way, must appear from the least reflection on the mutability of every worldly condition, and on the precarious tenure by which we possess all our external means of enjoyment and comfort. What an opportunity it affords us of doing honour to religion, none who advert to the principles which it includes and the effects it produces, can reasonably dispute. And what security we derive from it with regard to the interests and events of futurity, will be readily allowed, by all who duly consider the influence which our outward condition has upon our moral character and spiritual state.

If we well weigh these considerations, we must be convinced of the importance of acquiring the knowledge now recommended. We shall probably have occasion for the actual exercise of it. In our persons, in our families, or in our worldly circumstances, affliction may occur. Singular, indeed, will be our felicity, if we should altogether escape. The best antidote to affliction is the knowledge *how to be abased.* This is the only certain source of tranquillity. This alone can render us superior to the evils of life, and enable us to extract good from them. We cannot be unapprized, that the most illustrious displays and the most signal triumphs of religion are those which it exhibits in a scene of calamity and sorrow.

When we see it expanding the contracted brow of anxiety, wiping away the tear of grief, diffusing a glow over the pallid cheek, and sparkling in the dejected eye:—When we see its afflicted votaries calm and tranquil, firm and fearless, supported by trust in God, and solaced by the hope of futurity, and contented rather to suffer affliction with a good conscience than to enjoy the temporary pleasures of sin;—we admire its benign power, and feel ourselves unable to express in suitable language its superlative excellence and value. All are interested in the effects which it produces; and those must be equally destitute of understanding and sensibility, who do not wish to participate the divine consolation, which it administers.

To say no more in this way;—who can duly consider the danger of uninterrupted prosperity; the forgetfulness of God and futurity, which too generally attends it; and at the same time the momentous interests depending on the culture of a pious temper and the practice of universal virtue, without even wishing for some of those intervals of reflection, for some of those salutary and edifying pauses in the career of life, for which we are indebted to disappointment and affliction? *Before I was afflicted,* says the Psalmist, *I went astray; but now have I*

kept thy word. It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes. I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments. Happy are they, who, being abased, are made thus wise! How important the knowledge that is thus acquired! The benefits which it produces are of everlasting duration.

We shall close this discourse with briefly shewing, how this valuable knowledge may be acquired.

For this purpose, we should often and seriously consider, that our happiness depends more upon our character than our external condition. It is the disposition we cherish, and by which we are habitually influenced, and not the situation, in which we are placed:—It is the part we act, and not the post we occupy:—It is the conduct we pursue, and not the rank or condition assigned us, that constitutes true happiness. The mind is the place of happiness. There it dwells with piety and virtue and conscious integrity, its inseparable associates: and in vain do we seek for it in the busy scene or in solitary retirement; among nobles or peasants; in the palace or cottage; till we find a heart, endowed with those principles and dispositions that ensure its residence *there*.

Whether we are *abased* or *abound;* if our temper be accommodated to our state, and if we possess the principal requisites of happiness, an interest in the favour of God, the approving testimony of our own minds, and a well-grounded hope of futurity, our external condition is of secondary moment. With these qualifications, there are few so destitute as not to enjoy the necessary means of happiness. Whatever be our condition, if we make it our principal concern to maintain an irreproachable and exemplary character, we shall be disposed to acquiesce in it and to derive good from it.

Moreover,

That we may *know how to be abased*, we should cherish a conviction, that the lot assigned us is the appointment of an unerring and gracious Providence. This conviction will reconcile us to it; engage us to submit to the inconveniences and disadvantages that attend it; preclude murmur and produce content; and render us patient in bearing the evils and active in discharging the duties connected with it.

In order to our acquiring the knowledge, which the apostle recommends, we should also consider, that a proper disposition and conduct will ensure to us divine succour and patronage. As no condition, however low and

distressed, renders us incapable of virtue and piety, we cannot fail of being objects of notice and favour to the supreme sovereign and judge. With peculiar condescension and compassion will he regard those, whom he approves, in a season of exigence and distress. Should the world treat them with neglect and contumely, and should that succour which calamity demands from friendship be withheld; their most secret sighs are heard in heaven; and the Almighty will interpose for their support or rescue. If God approves us, and will not forsake us, when we need pity and protection, we have no reason to be alarmed or dejected, though affliction should overtake us. Besides, when we are *abased*, we should consider that pattern of excellence and of suffering, which was exhibited for our encouragement by our divine Saviour. *He humbled himself, and became a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;* and yet in due time he was exalted and glorified. We are also thus assured, that present affliction is no token of divine displeasure, and that its termination will be inconceivably glorious and happy. For it behoves us to reflect farther, that our trials, however numerous and severe, are temporary, and that their issue is certain and not far distant.

Finally, if *faith and patience have their perfect work*, a signal reward awaits the children of affliction.

These reflections, so obvious that it is sufficient merely to suggest them, and yet so important that they should often occur to us, will serve to fortify our minds amidst the vicissitudes and trials of life. That they may have their full effect, and that we may derive from them all the benefits, which they are calculated to afford us, let us at all times maintain *consciences void of offence towards God and man.* A self-approving mind is the best preparation for a season of distress. *If our own hearts condemn us not*, then *have we hope towards God.* In this hope we may triumph in every scene of life; and when life terminates, escape the terrors of futurity, and obtain an *abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

SERMON XIX.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ADAPTING THE TEMPER TO THE CONDITION.

PHILIPPIANS, iv. 12.

I know both how to be abased; AND I KNOW HOW TO ABOUND: *every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.*

How important and useful this science, and yet how difficult to be acquired! Nor is it less difficult and less necessary to know *how to abound* than to know *how to be abased.* If we advert, indeed, to the general sentiments and practice of mankind, we shall find many who apprehend difficulty in accommodating themselves to a state of abasement and distress, and who are much alarmed in the prospect of it; but we shall meet with few, who have any dread

of prosperity and abundance; who have any diffidence with respect to their temper and conduct in circumstances of ease and affluence; and who can persuade themselves, that a situation so desirable should be in any respect perilous and pernicious. To the disappointed and afflicted counsel may be needful and salutary; and they will commonly receive it with respect and gratitude. They will not reject those lessons of piety and patience which prudence suggests, and which are enforced on their regard by sympathy and friendship. They will wish to be guarded against the evils to which their condition exposes them; to be aided in the practice of the duties which it requires; and to be directed to those sources of consolation and support, which are best adapted to their exigence and distress. But the prosperous and affluent are too generally unapprehensive of danger, and, therefore, they are less anxious to avoid it. Or, they think themselves able to encounter with any trials that may occur, without any previous preparation. In human life there is, perhaps, no error more prevalent than this, nor more injurious to our virtue and happiness. Hence it often happens, that men are less irreproachable and exemplary in their conduct, and enjoy less real happiness, when they *abound* than when they are *abased*. This will,

more especially, be the case with those, who are suddenly advanced from humble and obscure to exalted and conspicuous stations; and who pass from a state of abasement to a state of ease and affluence, by a very rapid succession of favourable occurrences. Nevertheless, though the fact be unquestionable, there are comparatively few, who profit by the warning and instruction it affords. Similar revolutions produce similar effects; and every man thinks himself secure till the trial occurs.

This reasoning, for the truth of which we appeal to universal observation and experience, evinces the necessity of knowing *how to abound.* To the want of this practical science, or to imperfect attainments in it, we may justly ascribe the evil that has now been represented. In explaining and recommending it, we shall pursue the same order in which we have already discoursed concerning the art of knowing *how to be abased;* and consider wherein this knowledge consists, represent the importance of it, and shew how it may be acquired.

Those who *know how to abound* must be acquainted with the evils which they should avoid, and duly improve the advantages which they possess.

The first evil we shall mention, as incident to a state of ease and affluence, is the want of

due attention to the most important subjects and the most interesting concerns. Prosperity has a natural tendency to produce levity and thoughtlessness, and to preclude those grave and serious reflections, which are favourable to religion and virtue. When our worldly schemes and pursuits succeed to our wishes, and we meet with few interruptions and disappointments, our thoughts are apt to be engrossed by secular objects and concerns. These so far occupy our time and attention, as to allow us little opportunity or inclination for adverting to our duty and interest, as intelligent, accountable, and immortal beings. In some cases they have encroached on those sacred seasons, which are appropriated by that wise and good Being, who knows our frame and consults our security and happiness, to the purposes of meditation and devotion. In others, they have intruded into the recesses of the sanctuary, and blended themselves with reflections and exercises of a religious nature. Some they have deprived of the leisure for serious consideration: others they have indisposed for it: and many they have furnished with the means of filling up vacant hours with amusements, that are professedly pursued with a view of precluding or dissipating attention.

The prosperous, on whom the world seldom

or never frowns, and who have little experience of the vicissitudes of life;—persons, who enjoy uninterrupted health and ease, and to whom apprehension of insecurity and danger seldom occurs; and who possess the means of evading or diverting reflection, which health and affluence supply, want those powerful inducements to think of their present state and future destiny, which disappointment and affliction afford. Surrounded by perpetual sunshine, they never think of clouds and tempests. They forget the variable climate in which their lot is cast, and are heedless of a shelter against the approaching, though unperceived and unapprehended, storm.

Inconsideration naturally leads to forgetfulness and disregard of the providence of God. It is a charge alleged against the Israelites in the season of their prosperity, that they did not *consider*, and, therefore, they did not *know God*. The perfections and providence of the Almighty must become the subjects of reflection, before they can be duly acknowledged. To the eye of sense he is invisible. We only see the effects of his agency; but the agent himself becomes known to us only by mental contemplation. We perceive design, order and use in the works of nature. We possess capacities and means of enjoyment. But reflection is necessary to extend

our views beyond the information which we derive from sense and experience to the unseen Author of the order we observe in the creation, and of the happiness we enjoy. Whilst this order and happiness are continued without interruption, we are ready to ascribe them to established laws, and to the regular operation of natural causes, that are cognizable by our senses; and to make no farther inquiry concerning the first and supreme cause, *of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things.* As long as the course of events is constant and invariable; whilst we maintain our powers of activity and capacities of enjoyment in full vigour and exercise; and the plans we form succeed to our wishes; we are too prone to disregard that wise design, almighty energy, and benevolent direction, to which the course of the world and the condition of man are subject.

It is the occasional interruption of our blessings, that excites our attention to the Author of them, and that makes us sensible of our dependence upon God. As long as we seem to possess the springs of success and happiness within ourselves, and stand in need of no supply or succour which our own skill and attention cannot command, we are too apt to overlook the original source and the never-failing preserver of our corporeal and mental powers,

and of the whole succession and variety of blessings which we enjoy. But when disappointment checks the ardour of our pursuit; when calamity and affliction convince us that we are insufficient to our own happiness, and events occur contrary to our views and expectations; we are naturally led to acknowledge the dominion of Providence, and to seek relief and succour from the compassion and power of God.

That prosperity and abundance have a tendency to make men forgetful of God, is no less the doctrine of scripture than the dictate of reason and experience. No caution occurs more frequently in the sacred writings than that which is directed against this evil. *When thou shalt have eaten and be full,* says Moses to Israel, *then beware lest thou forget the Lord. When thou hast built goodly houses and dwelt therein, and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then take heed lest thine heart be lifted up and thou forget the Lord thy God, and say in thy heart, my power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth.* Against an evil which has been so commonly the effect of prosperity and abundance, it behoves us to be upon our guard; and if we would avoid it, we should frequently charge ourselves to recollect

and consider, that *by the grace,* or favour, *of God we are what we are.*

We shall thus also escape that pride and self-sufficiency, whiich are in some cases the effects of ease, affluence and worldly advancement. *Is not this great Babylon,* says Nebuchadnezzar, *that I have built for the house of my kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?* Little did the presumptuous monarch imagine, that, whilst the word was in his mouth, the decree was pronounced, *Thy kingdom is departed from thee.*

To that wisdom of counsel, patience of labour, activity of exertion, and perseverance of pursuit, by which men succeed and prosper in the world, a tribute of respect and praise is undoubtedly due; but the prosperous and affluent are too apt to arrogate to themselves a greater share of merit than they can justly claim. Having already succeeded beyond their expectations, they are ready to imagine, that *to-morrow must be as this day;* and that the issue of events is subject to their own direction and command. Mere abundance, separate from every circumstance that has attended either the acquisition or the use of it, has been sometimes the occasion of vanity and self-importance; and those who possess it have claimed a degree of attention

and homage, to which they are not entitled, but which the world has been too prone to render.

There cannot be a meaner and more contemptible kind of pride, than that which is the mere effect of affluence; and which leads a man to value himself and to demand respect from others, solely on account of his superior wealth. But this pride becomes still more unamiable and odious, if it be accompanied, as has sometimes been the case, with a neglect and contempt of indigent and modest merit, with insensibility of heart, and inattention to the wants and distresses of others. Men, whose wishes are gratified as soon as they are formed; who are strangers to pain and affliction; and who have never known by experience the trials of an abased condition, are in danger of overlooking the children of calamity and sorrow. Whereas those who *know how to abound* will condescend to men of low estate, and be careful to avoid every disposition and instance of conduct, which might expose them to just reproach. But it is needless to enlarge in this way.

We shall, therefore, add,

That the prosperous and affluent are in great danger of disregarding the concerns of futurity. They have so many strong attachments to the present state; so many interests to engage their attention, and so much reason to be satisfied

with the condition assigned them, that they almost forget the law of mutability and mortality to which they are subject, and are under great temptation to neglect the concerns of their souls and an eternal world. They put far from them the evil day, when their abundance must be transferred to new possessors. It is painful to think of surrendering their honours and treasures; and, therefore, evading or dismissing the apprehension of a removal to a new scene of being, the faith and prospect of it do not influence their purposes and pursuits in a degree suitable to their importance.

More especially when we consider,

That persons in easy and affluent circumstances have many inducements, not easily nor commonly resisted, to pursue amusement and pleasure to an excess, that is culpable and pernicious. They have, it must be acknowledged, an undoubted right to partake of the innocent recreations and pleasures of life: their situation allows of an indulgence in this respect, which would be criminal in others, and which an economy, equally necessary and laudable, forbids. But it requires prudence and caution to avoid the injurious extreme: to fix the boundaries which they should not exceed; and to pursue even allowable amusements without suffering them to encroach too much on our thoughts and time,

and without neglecting the more serious occupations and the more important duties of life.

To those who live in a scene abounding with temptations of this kind, and to whom opportunities must frequently recur, wisdom dictates caution: virtue and religion absolutely require it. Those who *know how to abound* cannot be unapprized of the necessity of avoiding an evil, to which they are so much exposed.

Having enumerated the evils to be shunned by those who are in circumstances of ease and affluence, we now proceed to mention some of the principal duties, which their situation devolves upon them, and to which the art of *knowing how to abound* directs their attention.

A devout acknowledgment of the Providence of God, which distinguishes them above many others, is evidently a duty of primary obligation. Every favourable circumstance, which a survey of our rank and condition suggests to us, furnishes a demand on our gratitude, and ought to engage our affectionate acknowledgment. Health and ease; personal security and domestic comfort; worldly prosperity and success; honour and affluence; and every blessing we enjoy, should be traced through all the immediate springs and occasions of them to the wise counsel, active energy, and benevolent direction and appointment of the Providence of God.

If we occupy a more honourable station and possess more ample means of enjoyment and usefulness than others, we are the more indebted to the divine goodness, and the more obliged to render a grateful and chearful tribute of praise. Ingratitude to earthly benefactors, whose power and benevolence are of very limited extent, is a crime against which every ingenuous mind revolts. Is it less criminal? Is it not much more culpable and odious, in its reference to God, from whom we derive all our powers of counsel and activity; who places us, by our introduction into life, or by the order of his Providence in maturer years, in circumstances that are easy or honourable or affluent; and to whom we are indebted for every advantage and talent that distinguish and make us happy? Nothing can manifest a more degenerate disposition; a greater want of just reflection; a more unamiable insensibility of temper; a more reproachful inattention to duty and interest, than ingratitude to God, whilst we are surrounded with the tokens of his beneficence. If we *know how to abound,* we cannot be unmindful of the source, whence our abundance originally proceeds, nor withhold from the donor the acknowledgment, which is his due. Gratitude would impart to the blessings we possess a peculiar value. It would enlarge our capacity of enjoying them; and be one means of securing

their continuance and of directing us in the proper improvement of them.

Farther,

Those who *know how to abound* will exercise compassion to the distressed and liberality to the destitute. Comparing their own circumstances with those of others, they will be so far from indulging vanity and pride, and treating persons less favoured than themselves with neglect and contempt, that they will think themselves peculiarly obliged to compassionate and relieve them. Their influence and wealth they will consider as talents, with which God has entrusted them for the good of others. They will deem it an honour to be his almoners. They will be happy in the reflection that they are capable of administering to the succour of the afflicted and to the supply of the indigent. They will wish to diminish, as much as possible, the distance betwixt others and themselves; to make them easy and contented and thankful in the humble station assigned them; and if their case admit of no substantial and effectual relief, they will endeavour to comfort and chear them by the exercise of an unaffected sympathy and compassion.

Moreover,

Those who *know how to abound* will be solicitous to adorn and recommend religion by an

exemplary conduct. The example of such is of unspeakable importance. They are like a *city set upon a hill.* The eyes of many observers are upon them. They will, therefore, be ambitious, not with ostentatious views, but from a real regard to the honour of religion and sincere desires of extending its influence, to *let their light so shine before men, that others, seeing their good works, may glorify their father who is in heaven.* They will dread the guilt of being accessary to other men's sins. They will be urged by principles of piety to God and benevolence to mankind to maintain a conduct, fit for the imitation of others, and that shall excite their emulation, whilst it exhibits to their view and conviction the importance and excellence of true goodness. By thus acting they will also aspire after and ultimately attain superior degrees of honour and blessedness in a state of future recompence. Persuaded that of *him to whom much is given much is required;* and that they derive from their situation signal opportunities of being exemplary and useful; and that by the faithful and diligent improvement of their ten talents they will finally ensure a proportionable reward; they will aim at distinguishing excellence in every disposition and practice that are honourable and praise-worthy.

If those who abound would duly consider,

how much the knowledge that has now been illustrated will contribute to their reputation, their usefulness, their security, and their final blessedness; they would feel a sense of its importance and be ambitious of acquiring it.

The reputation of the prosperous and affluent depends on the dispositions they cultivate and on the character they maintain; and not on the station to which they are advanced, or the abundance which they possess. They themselves must despise the adulation, that has no other object but their rank and affluence. They must suspect the selfish views of those servile flatterers, who ascribe to them qualities which they are conscious of not possessing, and who extol a merit to which they have no claim. If they would acquire real reputation and be entitled to the respect and applause of the wise and worthy, they must *know how to abound*; give dignity to their station by their conduct and not owe their dignity solely to their station; and derive esteem and respect from the manner in which they enjoy and use their wealth, and not from the mere possession of it.

The importance of *knowing how to abound* farther appears, as it is the only means of rendering us useful in circumstances of worldly honour and affluence. Those who abound enjoy peculiar advantages for this purpose; and wherever the disposition and ability coincide, they are

capable of doing much good. The sphere of their influence is extensive. Their example attracts notice and excites emulation. Their liberality, under a right direction, will do honour to religion; chear the disconsolate heart; and ensure to themselves the benediction of the poor and the applause of the final judge.

Moreover,

The knowledge now recommended will be of great importance to the security of those who possess it amidst the snares and perils incident to their worldly condition. It will secure both their virtue and their comfort. It will prevent their accumulating guilt and incurring a future doom; by misapplying their talents and advantages; by corrupting others and becoming degenerate and abandoned themselves:—and it will enable them to enjoy the gifts of Providence, with that gratitude and beneficence and hope in God, which are the essential ingredients of true happiness.

Finally,

The importance of *knowing how to abound* will appear, with full conviction, to those who reflect upon their conduct in its connection with a period of judgment and retribution. Such a period approaches. Wisdom requires us to regard it. It is a period, in which there will be a solemn and impartial review of the character and condition of every individual of the human

race. Our account will correspond to the talents committed to us. Our improvement and recompence will be adjusted to each other.

In the prospect of such a period, the mighty and the mean, the affluent and the poor, should duly consider, what manner of persons they ought to be. Acquainted with the nature and convinced of the importance of the knowledge, which the text recommends, let us be diligent in acquiring it. Let us cultivate the principles and dispositions and pursue the conduct, which this knowledge comprehends.

With this view, we should make a just estimate of the real value, uncertain continuance, and momentary duration of every outward distinction and blessing. Such an estimate would preserve us from pride and vain-glory on account of any little pre-eminence, which we may possess in relation to others. It would abate our confidence in the honours and treasures, which we hold by so precarious a tenure; and it would urge us to the faithful and diligent improvement of them.

Besides,

If we consider that we owe our abundance to the favour of divine Providence; and that it is conferred upon us and continued to us, as a trust for which we are accountable; we ought to employ it to the purposes for which it

is bestowed, and prepare for surrendering it, not only without regret, but with the hope of obtaining a richer and more durable inheritance in a future world.

It ought also to be considered, that prosperity and affluence, however pleasing they may appear in prospect, however eagerly they may be sought and however ardently pursued, are accompanied with temptations and perils, which it will require great wisdom to escape and great resolution to overcome. Many have been corrupted and ruined by them. Some we must have known, who have been rendered neither better nor happier by their advancement and affluence. If Providence, therefore, should afford us the means of worldly prosperity and success, it behoves us, as we value our integrity, honour, and peace, to study *how to abound;* to acquire the art of *using the world without abusing it.*

As we are professedly the disciples of Christ, we may derive from his example and doctrine peculiar instruction and powerful motives in the cultivation and exercise of this art. His views and conduct illustrated a superiority to the world, which we should endeavour to resemble. His character was the most excellent and exemplary that was ever exhibited in human nature; and yet his condition was humble

and obscure. His history beclouds the lustre of rank and affluence, and warns us of the folly and danger of estimating worth by dignity of station or by the abundance which any man possesses. His doctrine expressly teaches us, that a *man's life,* the true happiness of his life, consisteth not in the amplitude of his stores or the elevation of his rank. It presents to our desires and pursuit qualities of a nobler nature and more lasting duration than those which decay with time, and of which we must be inevitably bereaved by death. It fixes our happiness on a more solid basis than that of worldly honours and possessions;—on a basis, which will remain firm and immoveable, when the world disappears and the frame of nature is dissolved. It directs our views to a tribunal, before which rank and wealth will be of no account, and teaches us to expect a sentence, decisive and final, according to the character we have maintained and the works we have performed. With this prospect, it is of little moment, whether we are *abased* or whether we *abound.* Piety and virtue in every station will ensure a certain and glorious reward. That this reward may be ours, let us *be stedfast and immoveable and always abounding in the work of the Lord;* and if this be our character, *our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.*

SERMON XX.

ABUNDANCE NOT ESSENTIAL TO THE MOST IMPORTANT PURPOSES OF HUMAN LIFE.

LUKE, xii. 15.

—A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

IT is an observation, that cannot fail to occur in the perusal of our Lord's discourses, that he availed himself of every incident that happened, to communicate important and useful instruction. As he manifested his wisdom by declining to interfere in the determination of disputes, that had no immediate connection with the character he assumed and the design of his mission, his benevolence was no less conspicuous in embracing every opportunity that offered, for inculcating those principles of truth

and duty, which contributed to direct the practice and to promote the happiness of mankind. Whilst he was discoursing with his disciples, in the presence of a great multitude of casual attendants, one of the company, expecting to derive benefit from his counsel and authority, solicits his interference in settling a dispute between him and his brother. *Master*, says he, *speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.* If his claims were founded in justice, it may probably occur to us, on the first view of the case, that our Lord should have interposed in terminating the difference between two contending brothers, and in recommending an equitable distribution of the property, which occasioned their litigation. We may be ready to imagine, that, in so doing, he would have acted suitably to his character as the prince of peace, and that no injury could have arisen from his taking part with the complainant against the aggressor. Our Lord, however, well knew, that disputes of this kind were not comprehended within his province; that he was not appointed to be a judge in secular concerns, and a divider of worldly property; and that any interference on his part in cases, where the laws of his country must decide, would expose him to censure and reproach, and thus obstruct the proper purposes

of his mission. With a wisdom and caution, therefore, which, in a mind less discerning and comprehensive than his, must have been the effect of mature deliberation, he instantly evaded the danger that beset him, and declined giving any opinion on the subject in debate. He probably perceived, that the person who sought redress, whatever might be the nature of his claims, was under the influence of a disposition too much devoted to the world; and he takes occasion to warn him in particular, and the multitude in general, of the folly and pernicious effects of avarice. *And he said unto them, Take heed and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth;* or, as the words might have been rendered, more conformably to the original and more perspicuously in modern language; *for in whatever affluence a man be, his life dependeth not on his possessions.* Although our Lord, as on other occasions, declines giving satisfaction in a particular case, which was comparatively of little consequence, he directs the attention of his numerous auditors to a maxim, equally true and important, and which, duly considered, could not fail to produce the most beneficial effects. To the person, who besought redress, it would convey a lesson of reproof, if his claims were

founded in injustice; for the less affluence availed him, the greater must be his guilt and folly, if he acquired it by fraud and violence: and if justice were withheld or delayed, it would strongly inculcate acquiescence and patience. It would also tend to reconcile our Lord's disciples to the losses and sufferings, with which they must encounter in their new profession. It would weaken the attachment of the multitude to those worldly interests, which made them slow in acknowledging the divine mission and character of Christ. In its reference to mankind in every period of time and in every condition of life, the maxim of the text comprehends the most useful principles of conduct and of enjoyment.

What we further propose is, to illustrate and evince its truth; and, then, to enumerate and apply the practical inferences which it obviously suggests. *In whatever affluence a man be, his life dependeth not on his possessions.*

This maxim is true, if we consider it,

1st, In its reference to the security and duration of human life. This, I apprehend, was the primary, if not the precise, sense, in which our Lord applied it in the text. For in the example which he adduces in order to explain and confirm it, it is his evident intention to shew, that no affluence can secure and prolong the

continuance of life. A rich man is represented as amassing great wealth, contemplating it with complacency, and determining to enjoy himself in the undisturbed possession of it. But the purposes of his heart, however confidently entertained, however exultingly expressed, are broken off by the irreversible sentence of the supreme arbiter of life; who, in the moment of the rich man's imagined security, and of all his flattering prospects, requires the surrender of his soul. *This night,* says God, *shall thy soul,* or thy life, *be required of thee;* and, therefore, affluence, whatever advantages it boasts, can furnish no sufficient defence against the assault of death.

In the infancy of Christianity, and at the time when the maxim of the text was first delivered, those who ventured to avow themselves the disciples of Christ would derive no security from their possessions. Their affluence would expose them to peculiar danger. It would present a temptation which their enemies could not resist, and be the means of precipitating their destruction. Their life, so far from depending upon their possessions, was rendered more hazardous by them. Their riches would be a valuable spoil to their persecutors. Interest would increase the violence of their zeal. It would suggest pleas for oppressing and ex-

terminating men, whose affluence might enrich themselves; and render them ingenious in *devising* and active in *executing* expedients for destroying those, whose property they might plunder. None of those to whom the declaration of the text was first made could entertain a doubt of its truth. They knew, that it implied *more* than it expressed, and that their possessions would enhance the peril of their lives. Our Lord foresaw, that this would be the consequence of their assuming the profession of his religion. He warns them of it before it occurred; and fortifies their minds against an evil, which it would be impossible for them to avoid.

But the insufficiency of wealth to preserve and prolong life was not peculiar to a period, in which the ordinary course of events was interrupted by the prejudices and passions of mankind. It is a truth, restricted to no age or state of the world, but conformable to universal and constant experience, "that a man's life, whatever be his affluence, doth not depend upon his possessions." *They that trust in their wealth and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches*, says the Psalmist, *none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him;* and, by parity of reasoning, rescue themselves; *so that they should still live for*

ever, and not see corruption. The lease of life, when it is about to expire, cannot be renewed for any compensation which the most affluent may offer. There is no price, that can be considered as an equivalent for health, and strength, and multitude of years. No wealth can purchase an exemption from disease, decay, and death. The prosperous and affluent may, indeed, forget the uncertainty of their tenure, and be unmindful of the instability of their condition. They may vainly imagine, that *their mountain standeth strong for ever, and cannot be removed;* and that they may confide in those means of rescue from alarm and danger, which the counsel of wisdom has devised, and which their wealth enables them to procure with every possible advantage. But experience has, on many awful occasions, evinced the insufficiency of every effort of art for restoring health, warding off decay, and retarding the progress of dissolution. Nay, affluence itself has, in various instances, accelerated the evil, which it has disregarded and contemned. The heedlessness and inattention, the confidence and security, the indolence and inactivity, the self-indulgence and dissipation, which wealth has sometimes encouraged, and for which it has pleaded a kind of peculiar privilege, have multiplied the dangers to which

its possessors have been exposed, undermined the strength of their frame, hastened decay, and, either by accident or disease, shortened their days. So far, then, is affluence, in the ordinary course of nature, from contributing to the security and duration of life, that it has more generally produced the contrary effect. Those, whose situation requires industry and labour and the regular exertion of their mental and corporeal powers: those whose thoughts and time are suitably occupied, and who have no leisure for pastimes and gratifications which lead to excess, and which are often injurious: —persons of this description are least liable to those casual events or bodily disorders, which usually contract the duration of human life. Whereas those, whose condition exempts them from the necessity of diligence and activity, and furnishes them with means and opportunities for a considerable degree of self-indulgence, are most obnoxious to those calamities and evils, that limit the period of its continuance and precipitate decay and dissolution. In this respect, therefore, observation and experience justify the truth of our Saviour's maxim: *In whatever affluence a man be, his life doth not depend on his possessions.*

2dly, This aphorism, or proverbial saying,

is no less true, if we consider it in its reference to the happiness of life. Wealth, it is acknowledged, supplies many conveniences and comforts, which, to a mind rightly disposed, are means of real enjoyment. It is needless to disparage and depreciate these below their true value, in order to justify our Saviour's maxim in the text. But, allowing them all the importance and value, which the most ardent votaries of affluence can desire, happiness depends more on the sentiments and temper of the mind than on any worldly possessions. It is obvious, that, if the imagination and passions are subject to no restraint, we can derive little accession of enjoyment from any affluence, which it is in our power to procure. To imaginary wants and ungoverned passions there is no limit. No abundance can supply and satisfy them. Against groundless fears and imaginary evils affluence is no preservative. In this respect, the most wealthy are usually the most exposed. Having few real wants, that call forth their exertion and activity, fancy has leisure to feign those that are artificial:—of all exigences, these are the most difficult to be supplied. Of all distresses, these are the most incapable of relief. Exigences and distresses of this kind are commonly multiplied

and enhanced in proportion to the diminution of those that are real; and they are no less destructive of mental tranquillity and enjoyment.

Besides, the affluent are exposed in common with others to many real calamities and evils. In their own persons—in their domestic connections—in their secular concerns—in their moral and spiritual interests;—their peace and comfort are liable to interruption. They are a broader mark to the arrows of affliction than other persons. They are vulnerable in a greater variety of ways. They are subject to trials more numerous and, in many respects, more severe. Their bodily pain, and mental anguish, and outward crosses, are aggravated and imbittered by the survey of possessions that afford them no relief; by the consciousness, that their wealth is useless and ineffectual for administering ease and comfort; and by the humbling conviction, that their affluence cannot exempt them from the heritage of mortality. Less apprehensive of trial than other men, and more unprepared for encountering it; less accustomed to the discipline of disappointment and affliction, and, therefore, more incapable of enduring them; more susceptible by the organs of their frame, and the habits of their lives, of painful impressions and mental disquietude: evils, which others may meet without dismay,

and bear without complaint, terrify and deject their feeble spirits, disturb their tranquillity, and deprive them of that self-possession, which is essential to true happiness.

We need not add, that affluence furnishes no antidote to the anguish of guilt; that it cannot counteract and alleviate those fears, which faith in the moral government of God and a state of retribution occasionally excites in every reflecting mind; and that it is insufficient to recommend its possessor to the favour of the Almighty, and to establish a well-grounded hope of future acceptance and felicity. Incapable of producing these effects, how little does it avail to the happiness of a moral, accountable, and immortal being! *In whatever affluence a man be; his life,* that is, the happiness of his life, *doth not depend upon his possessions.*

3dly, This maxim is no less true in its connection with the usefulness than with the enjoyment of life. The affluent, it must be confessed, possess means of extensive and distinguished usefulness; and when they employ their wealth and talents in the cause of religion and virtue and to the purposes of benevolence, their example, influence, and liberality, are of the greatest importance and benefit; and they justly claim the tribute of respect and applause. Far be it from me, to suggest any hint, that may

detract from the merit of such persons, or diminish the honour and approbation to which they are entitled:—an honour and approbation, which ought to be more liberally and cordially bestowed, when it is considered, that affluence is not favourable, in the common course of the world, to very extraordinary exertions in the cause either of piety or benevolence. Wealth too often contracts the *heart*, whilst it increases the *ability* of its possessor. In many instances, new demands accompany new accessions of fortune;—demands of rank, of family, of fashion, of splendour and parade, and of pleasure: And when these are satisfied, the power of doing good, though the inclination may continue, is proportionably diminished. We may not probably err in asserting, that the most exemplary and useful characters are not generally found amongst the most exalted and affluent;—amongst those, whom wealth corrupts and misleads; whom rank separates from the multitude; whose station estranges them from the humble abodes of poverty and wretchedness; and whose abundance renders them insensible to wants, which they have never experienced, and which they have had no opportunity of familiarly and frequently observing. Considerations of this kind should teach us candour in passing judgment on those,

whose condition elevates them above the common ranks of society, and from whom, at the same time, more is usually expected than any have a right to claim. But they also lead us to conclude, that affluence, and all the circumstances that attend it, are not favourable to general usefulness. What is the dictate of fact and experience? Allowing for instances that ought to be excepted, some of which have fallen under our own notice; are we warranted in affirming, that men's usefulness, with respect either to their example or their beneficence, has increased in proportion to their possessions? Have we not observed and lamented the pernicious effects of affluence? Has it not separated some from the profession of their youth and riper years? Has it not made them indifferent to a cause, which, in less conspicuous stations and with inferior abilities, they have liberally and laudably supported? Where, then, are the children and descendants of those, who, whilst they were acquiring opulence, were exemplary in their religious profession, and zealous in their attachment to it? Are the principles of their parents and ancestors less true and important *now* than they were, when they produced visible effects? Is the cause to which *they* were devoted, less deserving of support? Does it less need the countenance of their ex-

ample and the concurrence of their liberality? *Why, then, is the house of God forsaken?* Why do we survey our religious assemblies with regret? And wish, but wish in vain, to find the places of the friends of our youth occupied by their descendants? What but the baneful influence of wealth has produced these pernicious, these deplorable effects? Shall it be said, in this boasted age of knowledge and inquiry, of prevailing truth and unmolested liberty, as it was said in the infancy of Christianity, *Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called? He who preached his gospel to the poor; who made choice of the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised: yea, and things which are not,* which are held in no estimation, *to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence:*—He well knew the truth of the maxim delivered in the text, and conformed to it in the introduction and establishment of his religion: *In whatever affluence a man be, his life*, that is, his usefulness, *doth not depend upon his possessions.*

4thly, By a *man's life* we may understand the great ends and purposes of his life; and the attainment of these doth not depend upon his

possessions. Whilst we honour those, who escape the snares and temptations, that accompany rank and affluence; who maintain their religious principles and pursue an irreproachable and exemplary conduct in scenes of danger; we cannot be unapprised of the peculiar trials to which their situation exposes them. We cannot be ignorant, that surrounded as they are with a variety of blessings, they are often prone to forget God and providence, and to be regardless of a future judgment and a world of retribution. The condition of the rich and prosperous is not the most favourable to piety and virtue. Their duty and danger are proportioned to the talents, with which they are entrusted; and to the impartial and righteous judge, they must render a corresponding account: and yet to be approved of God, by the exercise of integrity, devotion, and virtue, and to secure his final favour, are the highest and the most interesting purposes of human life. Other views, that are terminated by the boundaries of the present state, are comparatively of little moment. With respect to those ends, that are of principal importance, the condition of the affluent gives them no peculiar, much less any exclusive advantage. The favour of God and the happiness of immortality are connected with the disposition and

character, and not with the circumstances of mankind. It is according to what a *man soweth*, and not to that which is distributed to him, that he *shall reap*. His personal conduct, and not the condition that is now assigned him, will determine his eternal state. And as there is no station so high or so low, so affluent or so destitute, as to render the reward connected with virtue and piety unattainable; *that* condition is the most eligible, which is attended with the fewest obstacles and disadvantages in this great pursuit. What *that* condition is, seems to be wisely determined by the prayer of Agur, who requests that *God would give him neither poverty nor riches*. Similar to this in its meaning is the sentiment implied in the declaration of our Saviour in the text: *In whatever affluence a man be, his life*, that is, the acceptable performance of the great duties of life, so as to secure the character and happiness, for which it was originally bestowed, *doth not depend upon his possessions*.

The subject of this discourse enables us, in the *first* place, to vindicate the rectitude and goodness of divine providence in the present unequal distribution of its blessings. In the judgment of sober reason and mature reflection, this inequality is more apparent than real. When the advantages and disadvantages of the va-

rious conditions of life are properly estimated and fairly balanced, we shall find no occasion to arraign and censure either the righteousness or the benevolence of the supreme ruler. With regard to every important purpose of existence, men are more equal than a transient survey of their state would lead us to apprehend: and we can, therefore, have no reason to doubt the direction and dominion of a just and beneficent Providence.

Let us cherish a lively faith in it; and this principle will preserve us from pride and triumph in prosperity, and from dissatisfaction and complaint in adversity. For what we enjoy, we shall be grateful to God; and what we are appointed to suffer, we shall patiently endure.

This subject tends, *secondly*, to moderate our views and expectations with respect to worldly good. We are apt to flatter ourselves, that we should be more secure and happy, more useful and exemplary, if our condition were more elevated and affluent. We are sometimes led by this delusion to procrastinate our duty and enjoyment; and to amuse ourselves in the neglect of present opportunities of improvement and usefulness, by vain purposes of more distinguished and active exertion, when a more favourable season occurs. We are ready to ima-

gine, that if we possessed equal abilities with others, who are remiss and careless; if we were advanced to the stations which they occupy; our conduct would be very different from theirs. But in all such professions and resolutions, we forget the snares and obstacles with which a change in our condition would be attended. We overlook the temptations to be avoided and the difficulties to be surmounted;—temptations and difficulties inseparable from affluence. The only pledge of a faithful execution of our purposes, should Providence advance us to a higher station than that which we now occupy, is diligence and activity in the improvement of the talents, that are already committed to us. *He that is faithful in the least* will approve himself fit to receive a greater trust. Thus, whether we attain that situation of greater usefulness, to which we are directing our views, or not; we shall prove ourselves worthy of it, and derive benefit even from honest intentions, though Providence may not grant us an opportunity of fulfilling them.

This subject furnishes, *thirdly,* an antidote to anxiety, envy, and discontent. We shall neither distress ourselves with solicitude about the attainment of affluence; nor envy those who possess it; nor be dissatisfied and repining in our own condition, whatever it

may be; if we duly consider the maxim of the text, if we often advert to it, and make it the ruling principle of our temper and conduct.—*Whatever a man's affluence may be, his life,* with regard to the duration, happiness, and usefulness of it, or any important and lasting purpose to the attainment of which it may conduce; *dependeth not upon his possessions.* There is a folly, as well as guilt, in indulging any of those passions, that have been now recited; when the object that excites them is comparatively of so little value.

This subject evinces, *fourthly,* the importance of cultivating those affections and virtues, in the exercise of which true happiness consists. Although a *man's life doth not consist in the abundance of the things, which he possesseth,* he is a being formed for happiness. He is endowed with faculties and affections, that direct and urge him in the attainment of it. To the cultivation and exercise of these, then, let us direct our attention, and by that discipline and improvement of them which the doctrine and example of our Saviour recommend, and in which his grace will assist us, let us secure that happiness, which the *world can neither give nor take away.*

Finally, Let us direct our views and pursuits to future and eternal blessedness. The hap-

piness, which the world proposes, and which it confers on its most successful votaries, is imperfect in its nature, and uncertain in its continuance. With every possible advantage that attends it, their happiness can be of no long duration. When our Saviour warns his disciples and the multitude against deluding themselves with erroneous notions of happiness; when he cautions them against imagining, that it consisted in the abundance of their possessions, he evidently intimates, that they were capable of a more substantial and lasting happiness, than that which they might thus mistakenly pursue. This is the happiness to which he refers in another place, when he says, *What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?* It is the happiness of the soul and eternity. Let us diligently seek it; let us be anxious to secure it; and, then, animated by the well-grounded hope of obtaining it, we need not dread or regret the approach of that awful moment, when the distinctions of this world shall terminate, and virtue and piety will be the only qualifications for honour and a happy immortality.

SERMON XXI.

REFLECTIONS ON THE CHARACTER OF BARZILLAI.

II. Samuel xix. 34.

And Barzillai said unto the king, how long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem?

We have but a very short sketch of the character of Barzillai in the history before us. However, every circumstance that is recorded exhibits him to our respect and esteem. As a faithful subject, he did not desert his sovereign in a time of unmerited distress. When David was driven from Jerusalem, the royal city, and reduced to the condition of a fugitive and exile by the usurpation and rebellion of Absalom, his son; Barzillai, an affluent inhabitant of Gilead, contributed in a very liberal and effectual manner

to his relief and succour. The sequel of his history informs us, that he was as disinterested as he was liberal in the assistance which he afforded him. If he had entertained any expectations of personal honour or emolument, in return for the service he was rendering to an exiled prince, he soon enjoyed an opportunity of obtaining the accomplishment of them to the utmost extent of his wishes. Absalom was slain. The faction that supported him was utterly defeated: and David was restored to the throne and kingdom. The victorious sovereign was not unmindful of the attention and kindness which he had experienced in the hour of distress. With a change of circumstances he retained a grateful sense of his obligations to those, who served him in the season of his humiliation and exigence; and Barzillai seems to have merited peculiar and distinguished notice. But if the king was grateful, this faithful subject possessed a noble mind. In his disposition as well as in his rank and fortune, he was, what his history records, a *very great man.* He sought no recompence besides the satisfaction of having performed an act of affection and duty. He declines accepting the provision and preferment, which were intended for him, if he accompanied the king to Jerusalem; and he chose to spend the remainder of his days, beloved and respected by

his friends and neighbours; with the tranquillity and honour that never fail to attend an ample fortune and an independent, generous spirit. Besides, he had other concerns that demanded his attention of much greater importance than those of a camp or of a court. In retreat from the world rather than in new scenes of active and tumultuous life his principal interests would be most effectually regarded: and it ill became him, in his advanced age, to multiply his cares and trials instead of contracting and diminishing them. *How long*, says he, *have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem!* The reflection was that of a thoughtful mind, and the resolution dictated by it manifested true wisdom. They were peculiarly suited to the case of Barzillai, who, as the history informs us, was *a very aged man, even fourscore years old.* But they are capable of being usefully illustrated, in reference to persons of every age and station.

How long have I to live! is an important and interesting reflection. It is suggested to us on a thousand occasions; by the experience of our own frailty and by the mortality of others: and if we duly advert to it, we cannot less than derive benefit from it. For this purpose we shall illustrate the sentiments that are either expressed or implied in the declaration of the text; and then

shew, to what practical purposes it may be applied.

I observe,

1st, These words express a just and becoming conviction of the uncertain duration of human life. How prone is human folly to make an erroneous estimate on this subject! To indulge either heedlessness or presumption; to disregard the precarious tenure and narrow boundaries of present existence; and to take no account of its frailty or approaching termination! The life of Barzillai, it is true, had been prolonged to a very advanced period; and it may be said, that he could not reasonably have expected a much farther continuance. But the powers both of his body and mind, as far as we can learn from his history, seem to have been firm and active. His circumstances were easy and affluent. Prospects were presented to him sufficient to excite his ambition and to divert every apprehension of decay and dissolution. But he was too wise and thoughtful to suffer his imagination to mislead his judgment, and to make him regardless of that awful event, the approaches of which it was not in the power either of present health and riches and prosperity, or of royal favour and flattering prospects, much longer to retard. In the midst of all the advantages, that tended to render him unmindful of his mortality,

to protract the period of his enjoyment, and to remove to a distance, as an object of needless and disquieting alarm, the hour of his dissolution: he indulges the reflection, *How long have I to live!* How different is the conduct of Barzillai from that of those who endeavour to evade or stifle just sentiments of the momentary and precarious duration of life, when it is drawing near its close; who disguise and conceal both from themselves and others the advances of age by every artifice in their power; and whose attachment to life, both to its cares and pleasures, to its possessions and honours, seems to increase in eagerness and ardour, the nearer they approach to its termination! There is a fitness and decency in that sense of the frailty of life, in that attention to its short duration, and in that acknowledgment and expectation of its approaching end, which were manifested by Barzillai. Aged persons never appear more honourable, nor more entitled to respect, than when they are duly apprized of the limit of life to which they are tending; of the uncertain period that marks their progress to it; and of the short continuance of the longest interval that may precede it.

Whereas, nothing can be more absurd and inexcusable; more inconsistent with every sentiment of propriety, more ridiculous and at the

same time more detrimental, than that heedlessness with respect to their latter end, that wish to avoid thinking of it, that affectation of security, and those views and prospects of future years, which persons have sometimes manifested in the last stages of a prolonged life. When the inattention and gaiety and presumption of youth are connected with the imbecility and decay of advanced age; when the body and mind are at variance, the one bending to the grave and the other clinging with fond attachment to life and the world; and when the thoughts of death and futurity are utterly excluded or hastily dismissed by those, who are trembling on the borders of an eternal state; persons of just reflection cannot less than be grieved and astonished. In such circumstances no sentiment can be more pertinent and becoming, nor in its influence more beneficial, than that of the text; *How long have I to live!*

Nor let those, who are in younger or maturer life, and who are ready to imagine, that they have little interest in serious and grave reflections of this kind, be too confident in their own security. So frail and uncertain is life in every stage of it; so various and unavoidable the diseases and accidents that may interrupt the continuance of it; that those, who are seemingly the least exposed to danger, cannot be un-

profitably employed in occasionally meditating; *how long they have to live!* The reflection is adapted to the frame and condition of man, *whose breath is in his nostrils, and who, in his best estate, is altogether vanity.*

I observe,

2dly, The words of the text indicate a tranquil, composed, unanxious temper in the reflection on the momentary and precarious continuance of life. Barzillai does not grieve and repine in considering the short duration of his remaining existence on earth. He does not utter the language of discontent and complaint, and murmur under a conviction, that the approaching termination of his life precluded his availing himself of those flattering prospects, which his grateful sovereign presented to his view. He does not express a wish, that he could recall years of enjoyment and activity, which he had already spent, and that he could prolong, for purposes either of avarice or of ambition, the contracted period that yet remained. He looks forward to the close of life, fully apprized of its brevity, and without indulging the fruitless desire of protracting it beyond the term, which Providence had assigned him.

How lovely and venerable is the aspect of age in such circumstances as these! Unagitated by

conscious guilt in the review of life; unappalled by disquieting terrors in the prospect of futurity! Composed and tranquil, and yet, we may well suppose, humble and diffident; but without that self-humiliation and remorse, and without those disquieting apprehensions, which have sometimes produced sighs of regret and lamentation in the recollection of former years, and which have beclouded the scenes of future retribution!

Happy they, who, in contemplating the short and uncertain residue of their days on earth, are under no necessity of uttering the unavailing wish, that they could recommence their period of trial; that the shadow on the dial of their time could be made to move backward, or that its progress could be stayed; and that they might be allowed opportunity to cancel out of the register of their years those foibles and crimes, which depress the spirits and darken the prospects of futurity, in the concluding stages of a misspent life! The advanced age of virtue and piety is safe and honourable; it is tranquil and joyful. The reflection, *how long have I to live!* produces no regret and excites no terror. They may indulge it without disquietude. They have no reason to evade or to dismiss it, when it occurs.

As this is a reflection, which cannot be

avoided, which, indeed, it becomes us to indulge, in every stage of mortal life; it should be our concern so to act, that it may not discompose our peace and deprive us of hope, when it alarms our security. *How long have I to live,* may each of us be able to say without disquieting terror! Fearless of the termination of life, we shall not be disturbed and grieved by a conviction of its uncertainty. Whether it be prolonged or contracted; whether it close more gradually or more suddenly; our happiness is secure.

Farther,

3dly, The language of the text expresses Barzillai's contentment and acquiescence in the condition which Providence had allotted him; and it teaches us, that just views of the uncertain duration of life have an excellent tendency to restrain those desires, that produce dissatisfaction with the portion of good, which is assigned us, and a restless solicitude for superior means of enjoyment. Had Barzillai possessed the temper, which, in many inferior instances, has been the bane of true happiness; had he sacrificed the tranquillity of retirement and the independent dignity, which he enjoyed amongst his countrymen and associates, to the vain ambition of advancement in the royal court and palace, and deserted the less splendid sta-

tion, which he occupied in Gilead, for the more exalted rank, to which David might have raised him at Jerusalem; he would have pursued a conduct, which worldly policy would have applauded, but which true wisdom must have condemned. He would have surrendered a real good in actual possession for acquisitions and attainments, which, if they had been adapted to his years, would have yielded a very partial and precarious happiness. The self-denial, exercised by him on this occasion, was an evidence of a sound judgment, and contributed more to his enjoyment than any accession of honour and affluence, which he could have obtained by accepting the king's offer and accompanying him, with the assurance of advancement, to Jerusalem. And yet how many instances have occurred, in which less flattering prospects than the favour of a grateful sovereign have led men to sacrifice real for imaginary good! Dissatisfied with that humble rank and moderate competence, which are generally most conducive to true happiness, they have extended their views and wishes to higher and farther attainments; and they have found too late, by lamentable experience, that they have been grasping an unsubstantial cloud;—that they have been pursuing not only *vanity* but *vexation of spirit*. In some cases they have been

heaping up riches, without knowing who shall use them; they have been acquiring honours and titles, without being able to conjecture, whether they shall be transmitted to a wise man or a fool; and they have been projecting ease and enjoyment at the close of a wearisome pilgrimage, and have scarcely begun to reap the reward of their toil, till an awful voice has accosted them;—*This night your souls shall be required of you.*

The example of Barzillai is instructive, and inculcates a lesson of wisdom; and it also supplies us with a motive, that powerfully enforces it. *How long have I to live!* may each of us say, and restrain within just limits those desires and cares, which perplex and disquiet those who indulge them, and which seldom secure any real and lasting good. Uncertain of the duration of life, it becomes us to moderate our attachment to it, to acquiesce without dissatisfaction and complaint, with contentment and resignation, in the condition allotted us; and to suppress that solicitude, which has for its object, sometimes an imaginary, and in all cases a precarious good.

I observe,

4thly, The close of life is most likely to be rendered calm and tranquil by disengaging the mind, as much as possible, from secular pur-

suits, and directing its attention to spiritual objects and interests. Barzillai seems to have been apprized of this truth, when he declines to quit his native country and to *go up with the king to Jerusalem.* The royal court and palace were ill adapted to impart that tranquillity, which he wished to enjoy in the decline of life; to afford leisure for that reflection, which he wished to indulge; and to aid him in directing his attention to those concerns, which merited his chief regard, under a conviction *that he had not long to live.*

The same conviction should induce us, whatever be our age or station, to improve intervals that occur for those exercises of meditation and devotion, which will preserve us from being seduced by the cares and pleasures of the world, and from neglecting due preparation for a state of retribution. Without intervals of this kind the world will engross our whole attention, and we shall be indisposed for those religious and moral duties, with which our safety in case of a sudden removal and our happiness in a state of righteous recompence are essentially connected. As beings, who have here no continuing city, and whose abode on earth is momentary and precarious; we should *use the world without abusing it,* knowing that *the fashion of it passeth away;* and so blend our temporal and

spiritual concerns, that the one may not interfere with the other; and that, in the final issue, we may be found in the number of those, who have secured *that good part, which shall never be taken away from them.* With this prospect we shall have no occasion to lament the uncertainty of our present existence, nor to dread the solemn consequences of its gradual or sudden termination.

That we may possess that tranquillity and hope in the season of our last distress, which it is the province of religion to administer; let its principles be diligently cherished, and equally guarded against the scepticism that leads to infidelity, and the indifference, that prevents or destroys their effect. Let the practice, which it prescribes, be uniformly pursued; let the rewards, which it proposes, be rendered familiar to our minds; and let us often and seriously contemplate the connection that subsists between this life and another, and regard death as the harbinger of immortality. In this course of conduct, we shall be fortified against the closing conflict; and in the expectation of it, feel no distressing anxiety, though by a sudden attack, or a more gradual decay, we are admonished, that *we have not long to live.*

As a farther improvement of this subject, let the sentiment of the text be present to our

minds, when we engage in the duties of life. Men are heedless and remiss, lukewarm and irresolute, and prone to procrastinate and delay in their religious concerns, because they do not duly consider the shortness and uncertainty of their period of action and discipline. Do those persons, who are regardless of God, their souls, and an eternal state; who neglect or very irregularly perform acknowledged duties; and who allow themselves in practices, which lay the foundation of repentance, and which they must utterly abandon, if they would be truly happy? Do these loiterers and triflers, in concerns of eternal moment, reflect, *how long they have to live?* Would they persist in a course, that must terminate in ignominy and misery; that must inevitably expose them to the displeasure of God and the woeful effects of his just indignation, and that may issue in these deplorable consequences much sooner than they apprehend; if they were properly apprized, that time is transitory, life precarious, death and judgment approaching, and perhaps not far distant? Would they slight the means and the opportunities of securing the favour of God, an interest in the promises and hopes of the gospel, and a meetness for that world of retribution, into which they must soon be translated?—Would they do this,

from day to day, and from year to year, without any apparent sense of danger, if they considered, with that attention which their circumstances demand, *how long they have to live?* Under the influence of this reflection, *whatsoever our hands find us to do*, in reference to our character and state, as accountable and immortal beings, *we should do with all our might.* We should immediately apply to the practice of those duties, upon which our acceptance and happiness depend. We should engage in it with resolution and steadiness; we should persevere without wavering; nor should we need any other incentive to activity and diligence, to zeal and constancy.

The same reflection should also serve to moderate our attachment to our worldly possessions, and to direct and restrain us in the participation of the enjoyments of life. As our tenure of them is momentary and precarious, we should abate our confidence in them and our expectations from them; be prudent and temperate in the use of them; and endeavour to convert them, by exercises of piety and benevolence, into treasures of everlasting duration, and into a happiness, of which time and death cannot despoil us. *How long have we to live*, that we should extend our views to very remote attainments; that we should suffer our imagi-

nation to range through far distant scenes; that we should indulge anxiety about objects and events in which we may have no interest; and that we should amuse ourselves with hopes and busy ourselves in pursuits, the accomplishment of which is more precarious than life; and thus lose the opportunity of present enjoyment and of personal usefulness, by cares and fears, pertaining to occurrences that may never happen, and in which we, consigned, perhaps, to the rest and oblivion of the grave long before they arrive, shall have no concern! To this purpose is that excellent lesson of wisdom, virtue, and happiness, inculcated by Solomon: *Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.* Restrain that confidence in an ideal futurity, which is the source of much useless and pernicious anxiety, and the occasion of neglecting many duties of immediate obligation, and of imbittering many enjoyments in actual possession; since ye know not, *how long ye have to live.*

Under the influence of this sentiment, let us exercise patience and resignation amidst the unavoidable evils of life. Our afflictions are, as it were, but for a moment; and they have a tendency *to work out for us an exceeding great and an eternal weight of glory.* The injury resulting from them, and the trial of our faith,

peace, and patience, which they occasion, are of short and precarious continuance; but the benefit accruing from them, if they are properly sustained and improved, is permanent and eternal. In a state of conflict, where we are subject to pain and sorrow, we have not *long to live.* Death will soon bring with it a remedy for all our anguish, both of body and of mind, and a release from all the distresses of our external condition: but the rest and blessedness, for which the afflictions of mortality are designed to prepare us, and in which they will terminate, are everlasting. Let us, therefore, contrast the boundless duration of the one against the short continuance of the other; and we *shall count the sufferings of this present life not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed, when mortality is swallowed up of life.*

Moreover,

In all our domestic and social connections, let this sentiment, *how long have we to live,* regulate our temper and conduct, whilst they are continued, and restrain our sorrow, and administer consolation to us, when any of them are dissolved. Let us bear with each other's infirmities, exercise mutual sympathy and good will, promote each other's virtue and happiness, and aspire after reunion and renewed

intercourse in that state, where our errors and failings shall be known no more; and where every thing that is excellent and amiable shall be perfect and eternal.

Finally,

As we have not *long to live* in a state of trial and preparation, let us pursue with zeal and diligence the interests of immortality. There is a state in prospect, where our existence will never terminate. Thither let us direct our views; nor let us regret and lament that Providence should have ordained the present condition of our being to be as transitory and uncertain in its duration as it is mixed and mutable, and subject to distress and sorrow; since it is only a small portion of the existence for which we are designed; since we are formed for a more perfect and permanent state; and since, in the gracious intention of our Creator, and by the unmerited grace of the gospel, the most durable period of our being will be attended with no experience of error and sin, of pain and grief, of doubt and fear; but we shall be both sinless and immortal.

The reflection on the perpetuity of the existence, that shall be renewed to us beyond the grave, may well reconcile us to the brevity and uncertainty of the present life. We may triumph in the thought, that it is a life, during

the progress of which we are struggling with difficulties and trials, and chargeable with failings and imperfections, that is short and precarious: but that the better portion of our being is more durable. When our faculties and graces, our holiness and felicity, have acquired maturity and perfection, our existence will be uninterrupted and eternal. *When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away:* and as we shall have no reason to *wish,* we shall have no reason to *dread* the termination of existence, in a state where our virtue and our happiness will be immutable and everlasting. May those that are in advanced life be animated amidst the decays of nature, by the prospect of this state; and may all of every age pass the time of their sojourning on earth in the belief and expectation of it; and be found meet to share its felicity, whenever Providence removes them from a scene of trial to a world of retribution! Amen!

SERMON XXII.

THE ANXIETY OF PARENTS FOR THE VIRTUE OF THEIR CHILDREN.

IId Epistle of JOHN, Verse 4.

I rejoiced greatly, that I found of thy children walking in truth.

THIS short epistle was probably written some years after the destruction of Jerusalem. The writer of it was John the Evangelist, at the advanced age of near 90 years; and the person to whom it was addressed was a female of distinguished rank and character in the Christian church. The Jewish war, which terminated in the destruction of the holy city and temple, and which this apostle survived, had occasioned a dispersion of the Christians from the land of Judea; and, though this was the means of extending the knowledge and in-

fluence of their religion, it exposed them to many calamities and trials. The apostle John, who was remarkable for the sensibility and benignity of his temper, sympathized with them in their distress; inculcated upon them, in their state of exile and migration, mutual affection and attachment; and discovered, on various occasions, a paternal solicitude to guard them against abandoning their profession, whatever might be the perils that were likely to attend it. He well knew, that those who were distinguished by their rank and affluence would be exposed to peculiar danger. Their station would attract notice. Their possessions could not be secured in an unsettled state; and as they had more to lose than others in their adherence to Christianity, they would be under stronger temptations to desert it. He also knew, that it would require a degree of fortitude and constancy, which results from the maturity of age, knowledge, and experience, to maintain a profession, that would be assailed by various motives of allurement and terror; and, therefore, that persons, in early life, would be more easily seduced or alarmed into apostacy than others of more advanced years. Under the influence of these sentiments, he pays a tribute of respect to that illustrious female convert, who avowed her faith and re-

tained her profession in a station that must have exposed her to peculiar difficulties and hazards; and who had employed herself with such diligence and success in the instruction of her family, that her children were likewise, at an early age, steadily attached to the same profession. Honoured and happy parent! who merited the praise of an aged Apostle; who enjoyed the satisfaction of conscious integrity; who lived to see the success of her labours! Undiverted from domestic concerns and duties, by objects and pleasures, which have usually engaged the attention of persons in high station; assiduous in implanting and cherishing religious principles in the youthful minds committed to her vigilance and cultivation; and witnessing their progressive and permanent influence; we say, happy and honoured parent!—Such a mother, and the mother of such a family, had reason for self-complacency and gratitude. Well might the Apostle congratulate her, on account both of her personal character and her domestic felicity! Precious relict would she deem the letter he conveyed to her. Often would she unfold and peruse it; long as she might survive the aged and venerable writer. With maternal delight and rapture, would she dwell on this single paragraph: *I rejoiced greatly, that I found of*

thy children walking in the truth! Let pious parents; let devout and affectionate mothers, possessing the amiable sensibility peculiar to their sex, say, whether the reflection would not give a new flow to the stagnating current of her blood and spirits? Whether it would not smooth the wrinkles and furrows of age? whether it would not renew her youth, and solace her declining years, delay and procrastinate the approaches of death, and render her last slumbers composed and tranquil?

What we farther propose is, to explain the phrase of *walking in the truth;* and to shew what occasion of joy this conduct afforded to the Apostle, in its reference to those whose character he thus describes.

Under the appellation of *truth* the apostle comprehended all those principles of faith and rules of conduct which the gospel revealed and inculcated. By this mode of expression he represents, not only their unquestionable evidence, but their distinguishing importance. They possessed both these properties in so eminent a degree, that no one could be at a loss in understanding the meaning of the term, *truth,* whenever it occurred in the writings of the apostle. The phrase of *walking in the truth* denotes the conformity of the judgment, temper and practice to the principles and rules of duty, which

Christianity prescribes. The metaphor is obvious and intelligible; and the use of it in this connection plainly suggests that the doctrines and precepts of the gospel derive their chief importance from their practical influence; or from the effect, which they are calculated to produce on the disposition and conduct of those, who embrace them. As *truth* is the object of the understanding, so *walking*, when interpreted according to the mental and moral signification of the term, denotes the exercise of the affections, and will, and active powers. And, therefore, the phrase of the text expresses a conduct, directed and regulated by those principles and motives, which the gospel reveals; or, in other words, the union of knowledge and faith with a corresponding practice.

The persons, whose character the apostle describes, were duly informed concerning the nature and evidence of divine truth. Their faith in it was the result of inquiry and information; and it was accompanied with a lively sense of its importance and utility; and from a conviction, founded in knowledge, it acquired an influence in regulating their temper and practice. It was this conviction, that rendered them resolute and constant in their attachment to it; exemplary in performing the duties which it prescribed; active and zealous in promoting it;

and hence they derived those consolations and hopes, which animated them to proceed and persevere in their adherence to the profession of it amidst surrounding difficulties and trials.

If we would, then, imitate the conduct of those, who are distinguished by the commendation of the text, we must, first of all, acquaint ourselves with the principles of divine truth, communicated to mankind by Jesus Christ; and for this purpose recur to the instructions, which are delivered to us under the sanction of his wisdom and authority. We must cherish and improve, by a diligent examination of their intrinsic excellence, and of the evidence that attests their credibility, our faith in them. This faith must be exhibited to others by a visible profession; and it will be gradually more and more established. By knowledge and faith and a public profession of Christianity, we shall be urged and animated to maintain and to manifest in our general conduct a regard to the personal and social duties, which it inculcates; and to recommend our holy religion by its increasing influence on our own temper and conduct to the notice, esteem and practice of others; and we shall thus become entitled to the satisfactions and hopes, which it will administer both in life and in death.

By thus walking in the *knowledge, belief;*

profession, and *practice* of the truth; by thus maintaining its honour, and extending its influence, and securing its inestimable benefits, we shall acquire the character, which the apostle has described, and which he has recorded with a distinguishing testimony of approbation and applause.

Without a competent knowledge of the nature and grounds of divine truth, our faith will be mere credulity. Without a conviction of the evidence and obligation of our religious principles and practice, our profession will be an absurd and irrational superstition, or an outward form assumed from motives of ostentation, or for selfish and sinister purposes. Knowledge and faith, without a corresponding profession, will resemble a tree without leaves and fruit, concerning the vegetating state of which observers will entertain reasonable doubt. Religious principles and outward forms, without a consistent, uniform, progressive practice of virtue and piety; without a solicitude to promote the power and prevalence of divine truth, by counsel, example, and influence, will be ineffectual to any important and useful purpose; will redound to no personal honour and praise; will produce no substantial benefit to others; and will, in the issue, be unavailable to our own acceptance and happiness.

Walking in the truth is, therefore, a just description of the Christian character: and it belongs to those, whose faith is founded in knowledge; whose profession is connected with a suitable practice; and whose hopes of divine favour are justified by the uniform tenour of their conduct; by the consciousness of their own integrity, and by the approving testimony of the wise and good.

Such a character, though far from being blameless and perfect, is not defective in any of its essential parts; and it possesses this distinguishing excellence, intimated to us by the term of *walking* in the text, that it is permanent and progressive, and that it is gradually advancing towards perfection.

This was the character of the persons, whom the apostle John so highly applauds, when he says: *I rejoiced greatly, that I found of thy children walking in the truth.*

Let us next inquire into the reasons of his joy.

Similarity of sentiments and conduct would naturally lead him to rejoice on such an occasion. Good men take pleasure in each others' virtue and happiness. In the infancy of Christianity, when the number of its votaries was comparatively inconsiderable, those who were themselves convinced of its truth and import-

ance would be glad to acknowledge every new convert. Surrounded, as it were, with aliens and enemies; with Jews and Heathens, who were either ignorant of its nature and evidence, or in actual opposition to its influence, they would feel a strong attachment to persons of the same profession, and rejoice in every accession to the cause, to which they were devoted. In every Christian, who had resolution to avow his faith, and who manifested its effects on his temper and conduct, they would discover a friend and brother. Mutual affection would unite them to one another. Their joy would resemble that of sojourners in a strange land, when they met with persons of the same country and family with themselves. The apostle had been an early convert to the faith of Christ. He had maintained his profession for more than fifty years; and he could not have borne a more honourable testimony to his conviction of its truth and importance. From this evidence of his own sentiments concerning it, we may judge how sincerely he would rejoice in the accession of new converts.

Besides, such were the sensibility and benignity of his temper, that he would feel a peculiar satisfaction and delight in the prevalence of those principles and of that practice,

with which he conceived the present and everlasting happiness of mankind to be essentially connected. To a mind like his, equally pious and benevolent; impressed with a sense of the excellence of Christianity, and actuated by an affectionate solicitude for the welfare of men; it must have afforded inexpressible pleasure to behold an increase of proselytes to the cause of truth, religion, and happiness.

More especially when we consider, that he was not only an eminently pious and good man, and endued, in a very high degree, with those feelings and affections, which would dispose him to rejoice in the spread of knowledge, holiness, and felicity; but that he was also an apostle as well as a disciple of Christ. It was his province to preach the gospel of truth and salvation. He was under a special commission to instruct and reform the world; and to recover men from ignorance and vice to the knowledge and practice of true religion. In the execution of the office, with which he was entrusted, he was assiduous and faithful. He loved and honoured the master, in whose service he was engaged. He knew the importance of the message that had been committed to him. He was anxious for its acceptance and success. He could not less than rejoice, when a cause so

important in his estimation, so dear in his regard, so interesting to mankind, so conducive to the honour of the gospel, and to the satisfaction of its divine author, prevailed and prospered.

Another circumstance, that contributed to enhance the apostle's joy on this occasion was the rank and condition of the persons, whom he had *found walking in the truth.* The example of *their* profession and conduct could not fail to support the credit and to promote the spread of Christianity at a period, when the powers of the world were armed against it. From *their* integrity and resolution the timid would derive encouragement. Those who reproached religion on account of the obscure condition of its votaries would be induced to surrender their groundless and unreasonable prejudices, when they found that it was embraced by persons, no less distinguished by their outward station than by their exemplary conduct.

Besides, the Apostle would rejoice to discover amongst the faithful and zealous professors of Christianity the descendants of parents, whom he loved and honoured. He would recognize with pleasure the beneficial influence of an early education in their continued faith and obedience. He would participate the joy, which an affectionate mother would feel in the pro-

spect of their progressive piety and virtue. He would be happy in announcing an intelligence so grateful to a parent's heart. He would look forward with pleasing hope to the subsistence of religion in a family which he respected, and to the conveyance of it from one generation to another.

I shall only add, that the persons whom the Apostle describes were distinguished by their Christian principles and practice in their youth; and this was a circumstance that must have contributed in no small degree to the joy, which he expresses on the occasion recorded in the text. His period of service was drawing to a close. Many of his fellow-labourers, and all who had sustained the same apostolic commission with himself, had long since finished their course. He was happy to find a succession of those, who were likely to occupy useful stations, and to transmit the knowledge and influence of religion to a future age. In the faith and profession; in the virtuous conduct and zealous exertions of the young, he perceived the dawn of a brighter day than the Christian Church had yet experienced. He foresaw the duration of its privileges and blessings; and he indulged a hope which would reconcile him to the apprehensions of his own dissolution, that Christianity would obtain new votaries and advocates from one age to

another, till time itself should be no more. Thus also have aged Christians resigned themselves to the will of God and died in tranquillity and hope, after a long life of usefulness, when they observe in the disposition, either of their own descendants or of others, who are likely to survive them, an earnest of the duration of religious principles and benefits. The virtue and piety of the young have given them peculiar satisfaction. From these blossoms of the spring they have anticipated a fruitful harvest. These have afforded them assurance that religion will be transmitted to succeeding generations; and they have *rejoiced greatly,* in the prospect of future times and amidst gloomy and discouraging apprehensions, when they find those that are entering into life, and who are likely to continue for many years, *walking in the truth.*

To young persons in general this subject admits of a very easy and useful application. There is no period of time, in which their religious principles and conduct are not of the greatest moment to themselves, to religion, and to the world. But they are of peculiar importance in an age, when the visible profession of Christianity, to say nothing of the virtues and duties of it, is too commonly neglected. At such a period, the young will be in great danger of renouncing, with the forms of religion, those

salutary principles, which are the most effectual preservatives of their virtue and welfare, and the most powerful incentives to an exemplary, useful and laudable practice. Let them guard against the evil to which they are exposed by cultivating an acquaintance with the grounds and evidences of their Christian faith; and *be able to give a reason of the hope that is in them.* It is by enlightening the understanding with just sentiments concerning the doctrines, and duties, and promises of the gospel; by convincing the judgment, that it is worthy of credit, and fit to be the guide of our conduct and the foundation of our hope with regard to futurity; and by enabling those who assent to its truth to vindicate their faith against the objections of unbelievers:—It is by such means that we *shall hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering;* and that the principles we imbibe will become effectual for the direction and regulation of our conduct. A profession that is not founded on knowledge; that is not justified and encouraged by it, will neither be honourable nor lasting. We shall neither retain it in the hour of trial nor derive any satisfaction or credit from it.

Let youthful minds, then, be well instructed in the principles and evidences of religion. Let them be taught betimes to distinguish truth from falsehood; the doctrines of divine revela-

tion from errors of human invention: and what is essential, important, and useful, from doubtful and trivial speculations; and they will go forth into the world fortified against the seduction of those who lie in wait to deceive, and to cause them to *fall away from* their own stedfastness.

Let the profession of religion, thus founded on the only sure basis of knowledge and conviction, be habitual and constant. Early habits of every kind are likely to prove durable: so true is the observation of Solomon: *Train up a child in the way wherein he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.* The attendance of young persons on the public duties of religion is in itself pleasing and laudable. It indicates a rectitude of understanding, a seriousness of disposition, a desire of improvement, a regard to reputation, and a solicitude to secure the esteem of the wise and worthy, and to lay a foundation for future usefulness and comfort, which cannot fail to recommend them to notice and approbation, to the praise of good men, and to the favour of Almighty God. By this visible and declared attachment to religion in early life, they will escape many temptations which beset those, who have imbibed no steady principles and who are pursuing no fixed plan of conduct. They will be known and distinguished

as persons, who are not to be easily seduced and corrupted; who are guarded by inclination and habit, and an approved character, against the attempts of the licentious and profligate, and who have a reputation to lose which they will be anxious to maintain, and which no common allurement will induce them to forfeit.

This exemplary profession will furnish young persons with very powerful motives to a corresponding practice. They will be protected and encouraged in a virtuous conduct by the religious principles, which they have adopted; by the character of their chosen associates; by the beneficial influence of the institutions, on which they customarily attend, and by the exercises of devotion in which they engage. Impressed betimes by a sense of the importance and benefits of religion, and inclined by the sentiments and habits of early life to the practice of its personal and social duties, they will persevere in the course on which they have entered: they will not allow themselves to deviate from it. Every step of their progress will be pursued with increasing facility and delight, and it will be their distinguishing character that they *walk in the truth.* Daily experience will bear testimony to the wisdom of their choice; and they will find in their advancing years, and amidst the trials of prolonged life, that the way of

truth is the way of safety and peace, of consolation and hope. They will approve the conduct they have pursued. They will rejoice that they have been enabled to persevere. The review of past years will brighten their prospect of future life, encourage their trust in the providence that has defended and succoured them, and afford them occasion for gratitude and joy in the closing scene of their pilgrimage and in the expectation of death and retribution.

Every argument of wisdom and duty, of honour and interest, which we have now urged to engage young persons in general to walk in the truth, may be applied, with still greater force, on the attention of those, who are the descendants of religious parents. It behoves *them* farther to consider, that they are under obligations peculiar to themselves. I shall not now say, that more is expected from them than from others. I shall not lead them to recollect the superior advantages which they have enjoyed and the expectations that are formed concerning them, and the disappointment which they will occasion, by the neglect of religion, to those that are most anxious for their welfare. But I shall suggest to them the more ingenuous consideration of the joy they will afford to the wise and good in general, and to their pious parents and friends in particular. Such persons

will *rejoice greatly,* when they observe them *walking in the truth.*

Let young persons of every description farther reflect, how much their exemplary conduct will contribute to the credit and influence of religion and to promote the interest and honour of the Christian Church. Nay more, it will extend its benign effects to every society, with which they are connected. It will impress a character on the age in which they live; and it will transmit piety and virtue, and all the blessings resulting from their prevalence, to succeeding generations.

Finally, Parents may learn from this subject, and derive encouragement from the history on which it is founded, to be faithful and assiduous in the instruction of those that are committed to their care. They have every reasonable prospect of success: and great will be their joy, whilst they live and when they die, and in the prospect of judgment and retribution, when they behold those that are connected with them *walking in the truth,* and affording them the animating expectation of being united with them for ever at the resurrection of the just.

SERMON XXIII.

SOBRIETY OF MIND RECOMMENDED TO YOUNG PERSONS.

TITUS, ii. 6.

Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded.

THE sentiments and conduct of young persons in general are so important to themselves, to their social connections, and to the civil community of which they are members, that we should incur deserved reproach and blame, if we neglected to avail ourselves of every suitable opportunity, for addressing them with expressions of our good wishes and of our solicitude for their virtue and welfare. There is no mode of address, by which we can so emphatically express our affectionate attachment; —there is no language, in which we can so unequivocally declare our concern for their true

honour and happiness;—there is no counsel, in which their best friends will so cordially concur with us, as that of the exhortation in the text. The object of this exhortation, when duly explained and understood, is very comprehensive. The grounds and reasons of it are such as to justify every attempt to enforce it on the regard of those whom it more immediately concerns.

When we have illustrated the virtues and duties, which sobriety of mind includes, we shall urge the cultivation and exercise of it by suitable motives. I observe,

1st, To be sober-minded is to be thoughtful and deliberate, in opposition to heedlessness and inattention. Under this part of the subject, we do not mean to recommend to young persons that real, much less that affected, gravity of aspect or demeanour, which is utterly inconsistent with their years. Vivacity and chearfulness are not only allowable but pleasing, at this period of life. So far from being restrained, they should be indulged and encouraged. There is even a degree of thoughtlessness and levity, for which those who recollect, that they were once young themselves, will be ready to make an apology. In the domestic and social circle, the gaiety and sprightliness of the young, surrounded by kind friends, attracting general notice, and indulging agreeable pros-

pects, should not only be excused, but promoted; and a period of life, in which no experience or apprehension of distress has depressed the spirits and saddened the temper, should be rendered as chearful and happy as possible. The reflection and deliberation, which we recommend, are by no means incompatible with those occasional sallies of mirth and pleasantry which are natural to the young; which it is needless to restrain; and which it would be wrong to disallow and prohibit. Nevertheless, as infancy ripens into youth, and advances towards maturity, the attention may, and ought to be directed towards subjects of greater importance than those that are merely designed to amuse the present moment. The powers of the mind should be cultivated and exercised in a manner adapted to its capacity from the earliest period; and young persons should betimes be accustomed to think and judge, to deliberate and determine, with respect to subjects on which their conduct and their happiness depend. They will be able to distinguish, much sooner, perhaps, than we are apt to apprehend, between right and wrong:—what they ought to do, and what they ought to avoid;—what will conduce to their reputation and comfort, and what would tend to their disgrace and injury. Those, to whom the superintendance

of their infant years is committed, should give them the assistance they need, and with that condescension to their feeble faculties, which may be most likely to render it effectual. When their understanding acquires a greater degree of comprehension and vigour, they should deliberate and judge for themselves; they should learn to discriminate between good and evil, praise and blame, honour and reproach, happiness and misery; and resolve to pursue that course of conduct, which counsel and example teach them to be most likely to prevent evil and to secure good. Whilst education directs their views to a variety of objects, that are connected with their occupation or profession, and with their future advancement and reputation, according to the rank and condition which Providence assigns them; they should not be unmindful of their duty and interest as rational, moral, accountable, and immortal beings. If they are capable of employing their thoughts with advantage on those mental or external accomplishments, that are adapted to qualify them for their station in civil life; they are no less competent for deliberating on the principles they should adopt and the course they should pursue, as subjects of the moral administration of God; as the disciples of Jesus Christ, his Son, enlightened by his doctrine, redeemed

by his death, and hastening to his tribunal; and as candidates, by divine mercy and the mediation of the Saviour, for a future and happy immortality.

If young persons improve in subordinate attainments and in those exercises of the understanding, that pertain to their rank and duties in society; they may reasonably be expected to acquire that knowledge, with which their everlasting destiny is connected; and to be thoughtful and deliberate with regard to their conduct, as intelligent and moral beings, responsible to God, and designed for an existence of eternal duration. Heedlessness in concerns of such moment cannot, at any age, plead a sufficient excuse. The importance of virtue and piety, in their relation to present and future happiness, is so obvious; it is so easily discerned; it is urged on attention by so many plain and interesting motives, that it cannot but be perceived and acknowledged by the most juvenile understanding. "Has the God, who made me, and who introduces me into life with so many advantages," may the youngest say, "no claim on my esteem and veneration, on my gratitude and worship, on my submission and obedience? Can I be happy in any condition without his favour; much less as the object of his displeasure? Whatever, therefore, he requires,

it is my duty to perform. Whatever he forbids, it is my wisdom to avoid. The course which he prescribes will lead to security and happiness. That which he disapproves can terminate only in shame, distress, and ruin." By such and similar reflections, level to the capacities of children in years and understanding, may the mind be impressed with a sense of the obligation and utility of a religious and virtuous practice. To such reflections it is our duty to direct them, and it is their duty to advert. When they thus deliberate, they cannot long hesitate in determining what to chuse and how to act. The approbation of their own minds; that of their best friends; and that of the world at large, for men of every disposition and character respect integrity and virtue; will soon convince them of the rectitude of their choice and conduct.

Farther,

2dly, Sobriety of mind comprehends caution and circumspection in opposition to rashness and presumption. The thoughtful and deliberate youth, however prudent and laudable his resolutions, will perceive that he is exposed to temptation and danger. Irregular propensities from within and allurements from without will evince the necessity of wariness and vigilance. Amongst those of his own age and

station, he will probably discern some that are destitute of good principles and addicted to a culpable conduct. He will find it necessary to be upon his guard, to prevent surprise, to resist seduction, and to avoid being betrayed into folly and guilt. That timidity, which is the defence of integrity—that caution, with which is connected security—that vigilance, which foresees and provides against danger, he will maintain in constant exercise; and he will thus escape evils, of which the heedless and unwary have no previous apprehension, and which consequently they have no means of preventing or avoiding. The prudent and cautious, on the contrary, perceiving distant danger, and anxious for their own safety, will devise a way of escape. They will abandon connections, that are ensnaring and perilous. They will seek an asylum in the society of the wise and upright. They will renew their good purposes; and instead of trusting solely to their own prudence or fortitude, they will derive assistance from the exercises of devotion and from the promised succour of the Almighty. Thus aided and guarded, they will obtain, in the season of apprehended or actual trial, either rescue or victory.

In every age and condition of life, vigilance and caution are indispensably necessary to the

security of our virtue and happiness; but they are of peculiar importance to the young and unexperienced. Less apprized of danger, and less accustomed to alarm and suspicion than those, whom longer intercourse with the world has made sensible of the perils and trials to which they are liable; it behoves them to supply the want of experience by unremitting vigilance. Like mariners traversing unknown seas, and unacquainted with the rocks and shoals that render their course hazardous, they should keep constant watch; they should never quit the helm; they should frequently inspect their chart and compass; and, in a word, avail themselves of every kind of information and assistance which their situation requires.

How many young persons of excellent talents, amiable disposition, and promising hopes; from whose introduction into life and temporary progress in a virtuous and laudable course we had every thing to expect; how many, alas! of this description have miscarried, made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, and frustrated the most flattering expectations, for want of that prudent caution, which we are now recommending! Under the mask of friendship, of pleasure, of honour, of gain; under a thousand different

forms of delusion, has the danger been disguised; and the consequence has been unapprehended, and, in some awful cases, irretrievable, ruin.

3dly, Sobriety of mind includes humility and diffidence in opposition to self-conceit and self-confidence. If there be any error or fault, to which young persons of the present age are more addicted than those of former times, it is that of thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to think. The means and benefits of education are more generally diffused: they are more actively communicated; they are enjoyed in an earlier period, than they were in past ages. The understanding of course ripens sooner. Knowledge is acquired at an earlier age. Those who would have been deemed and treated as children in the days of our ancestors, assume a manliness and maturity, which are hardly consistent with their stature and their years. Like those plants, which are set in a rich soil, and to which the cultivator directs an incessant attention, they spring up and blossom, and bear fruit at a season, in which vegetation scarcely commences in the open field, in a more ungenial climate, and without the aid of extraordinary culture.

Whilst we are ready to allow to the present generation superiority in a variety of accomplishments, mental and external, to those who lived in preceding periods; and whilst their earlier attainments furnish some kind of apology for an aspect and manners, adapted to maturer years, which they exhibit; they ought to recollect that their pre-eminence above others of the past age is owing, not to their possessing superior faculties, but to their enjoying greater advantages than they. Their earlier maturity, if they duly considered whence it springs, should excite gratitude and inculcate humility. If they are better informed than others, of the same age with themselves, in a former period, instead of arrogating to themselves any peculiar merit, and looking back with a kind of contempt on the slow advances of their progenitors, they should be thankful for superior means of education; and a sense of their obligation to the providence of God, which has distinguished the age in which their lot is cast, and which has given them parents and friends, who have had both the ability and the inclination to aid the culture of their minds, will produce and preserve a lowly, modest, and diffident temper.

Whilst no qualities are more amiable and more praise-worthy than the humility and unassuming aspect and demeanour of a well-informed and accomplished youth, who has duly improved his talents and advantages; whilst modesty throws a mild and pleasing lustre over every grace and attainment he possesses; and whilst it commands the notice and applause, which it apparently declines: self-conceit and arrogance depreciate the value and detract from the merit of real excellencies. They forbid the acknowledgment and deprive them of the praise that are their due. Real merit need not obtrude itself upon public notice. It will be discovered though veiled by humility. The commendation, that is not claimed and extorted, will be more liberally and cheerfully bestowed.

Young persons sometimes err not only in estimating the *degree* of their proficiency and attainments, but in overrating the respective *importance* and *value* of the accomplishments they have acquired. Increasing years and knowledge will correct the former error; and the more they improve, the more sensible they will be of their own defects:—As a traveller, who ascends from one eminence to another, commands a more extensive horizon, and as he advances from one stage of his journey to another, has a more distinct perception of the distance

that still lies before him, whilst that which he has already passed is contracted in his estimation. But those, who err in appreciating the *importance* of any acquirements they have made, will be in danger of retaining their error from the delusion of the world. External accomplishments have, without doubt, their value and use; and their importance depends on the rank and station which we are destined to occupy. But they are too generally overrated; and those who excel in them have much to fear from the fashionable folly of the age in which they live, and from the attention and adulation which such accomplishments command: whilst intrinsic and more substantial excellencies are overlooked and neglected. By degrading the former to their proper rank, and exalting the latter to the eminence that belongs to them; young persons will be preserved from mistaken notions of themselves, and from that self-conceit and arrogance which no attainments, however distinguished and laudable, can justify, and for which attainments of a secondary and subordinate nature furnish no admissible plea.

Humility and diffidence are in no instance of greater moment and utility than in the conduct of our religious inquiries and in the adoption of our religious sentiments. The present age abounds with those, who are too wise to be

instructed, and who, at a very early age, think themselves capable of solving difficulties and deciding questions, that have engaged the attention and perplexed the inquiries of divines and philosophers of the first rank in literature and theology, for many past ages. It grieves and offends one to think with what unabashed confidence the most important principles of our faith and hope; the most useful institutions of a religious nature; and the most pleasing and beneficial exercises of social devotion, transmitted to us from our honoured and lamented ancestors, and justified by their attachment whilst they lived and by their dying testimony, have been depreciated and contemned by modern writings and by modern practice. It is painful to add, that the youthful descendants of some, who were distinguished by their adherence to the faith and worship, which are the basis and support of true religion and virtue, have, even in an age of immature and unexperienced adolescence, discarded the creed and abandoned the religious and social institutions, which their progenitors held in high esteem and veneration. Far be it from me to discourage, much more to condemn a spirit of inquiry! There is no truth so sacred; there is no practice so sanctioned by ancient and general usage, as not to demand and justify impartial scrutiny. But

let it be the scrutiny of a meek and humble mind; unperverted by prejudice; unseduced by an affectation of superior sagacity and comprehension; indisposed to treat with indifference, much less with disdain, the sentiments and practice of the wise and good in former days. To such a scrutiny we fear not to entrust the truth and importance of our Christian principles and of the religious institutions, which cherish their influence, and which preserve and perpetuate their duration.

Let young persons be slow in rejecting what argument establishes and what the laudable practice of their progenitors recommends; nor dread the charge of vulgar credulity and superstition, whilst they maintain an attachment to Christian principles and Christian worship. If they differ, in consequence of diligent and modest inquiry, in any of the articles of their religious creed, from their parents and ancestors; let them not treat the sentiments they discard with contempt; much more let them not disparage either the understanding or the character of those who adopted and maintained them. Always diffident of their own judgment, and ready to hear argument and admit conviction; always humble and modest in avowing and maintaining the opinions they embrace; always detesting every indication of conceit and arrogance, and

avoiding the most distant approaches to this temper of mind; they will justly claim; they will certainly receive every desirable expression of respect and esteem from the wise and good.

4thly, Sobriety of mind includes moderation of views and expectations in the prospect of futurity, contrasted against unwarrantable ambition and self-sufficiency. The young are apt to entertain erroneous notions of the scene that lies before them, and to indulge hopes that are seldom accomplished, at least to their full extent, in the progress of their years. When age and experience occasionally vent a sigh over the vicissitudes of human life, and when they suggest hints that tend to abate confidence in the prospect of future time; the young sometimes attribute to gloom and moroseness of temper, or to the effect of some singular disappointment or calamity, every indication and every intimation of this kind. They are ready to imagine, that, whatever may have been the experience of others, their condition will be more prosperous and happy. They anticipate, by the fiction of a luxuriant and inventive fancy, a variety of unalloyed and permanent satisfactions and enjoyments. Their fertile imagination is busy in devising plans and concerting purposes of uninterrupted and increasing felicity in the succession of future years. Ambition aids the de

lusion by enlarging their views and prospects, and flatters them with honours and emoluments, with which they connect elevation of rank, dignity of station, and corresponding reputation and influence; and to the possession of all these advantages they annex undisturbed and permanent security. It is natural for young persons, before the age of experience arrives, to indulge such views and expectations; and if they were warranted by the course of human events, it would be needless to correct and restrain them. But a sober judgment detects and exposes these illusions of the youthful fancy. It delineates in characters more conformable to the original the true condition of human life. It exhibits to their view the mutability and uncertainty, that are annexed to the most secure and happy state, and thus prevents the mortification and anguish of disappointment. It restricts their pursuits to practicable attainments. It prepares them for deriving satisfaction from partial and imperfect enjoyments. It leads them to exercise contentment and resignation in a variable and fluctuating condition. It prepares them for trials, which, overlooked and disregarded, would find them feeble and unfortified, and leave them querulous and unhappy.

This sobriety of mind would likewise induce them to cultivate and cherish just views of the

providence of God in allotting to them such a blended portion of good and evil. It would evince the importance and utility of religious faith and hope; and engage them to exercise trust in the sovereign of the universe, submission to his will, and the hope, connected with pious principles and a virtuous practice, of his present protection and succour, and of his everlasting favour.

5thly, Sobriety of mind comprehends the restraint and government of those appetites and passions, that pertain to our present corporeal and animal existence; in opposition to that gratification and indulgence of them, which prudence forbids and religion condemns. The evils that result from unrestricted licence in this respect, and to which the ardour and impetuosity of youth particularly expose them, need not be recited and described. Pleasure is the fallacious appellation by which they are denominated and disguised. Against this fallacy the young should be guarded. Before experience, at a dear purchase, teaches them wisdom, they should acquire the art and habit of keeping their passions within due bounds; and of avoiding those kinds and those degrees of indulgence, which militate against every important and valuable interest of their being; which injure their health, their fame, and their com-

fort; which entail anguish and distress on their maturer and declining years; and which darken their prospects of that nobler existence, in which *this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality.* On this part of the subject it is needless, and it would be improper, in more explicit language, to enlarge. Sobriety of mind, habitually cultivated and exercised, will be the best defence against the attack and influence of such temptations, as are most likely to ensnare the young, and involve them, if not resolutely opposed and vanquished, in infamy and wretchedness.

With regard to those amusements, that are innocent and allowable, I shall only observe, that the sober-minded will select them with discretion; pursue them with moderation; and never substitute pleasure for business, or suffer the pastimes of a vacant hour to interfere with any obligation of duty, or with the serious occupations of life.

6thly, A sober mind will be stedfast and persevering in all its deliberations and purposes, in opposition to fickleness and inconstancy. The young are apt to change and waver. There is a degree of flexibility and variableness in their temper, which, unless it be duly watched and guarded, will render them fluctuating and unstable in their conduct. Tenaciousness and

obstinacy are unamiable and odious. They should be ready to listen to reason, and to yield to conviction. But at the same time they should not be always shifting and changing, either their opinions or their practice, as new circumstances arise. A versatile conduct indicates a feeble mind. Having made their election, with the best counsel and the best exercise of their own judgment, what principles to adopt, and what course of action to pursue; let them be steady and persevering. Let no new friend, that may captivate their esteem; let no new book, which they may chance to read; let no new connection, into which they may be introduced; let no change in their outward circumstances; prevail with them to surrender what is important in principle or in practice. On the foundation of a piety and virtue, commenced in their youth, let them rear the fair and goodly superstructure of an amiable and respectable character. Let them proceed in a course of undissembled religion, aided by the exercises of private and social devotion; adhering both to the faith and practice which it recommends, as they advance in years. As they grow in stature and improve in wisdom, let them also increase in favour with God and man. From their early attachment to religious virtue;—an attachment incorporat-

ed, as it were, in their frame, entwined with every fibre of the heart, and interesting every principle and affection of their minds; we may augur, with peculiar satisfaction and pleasure, their persevering adherence to it in the progress of life. They themselves will derive, from the review of their early years, inducements to go on and prosper. Nor will they desert, nor, indeed, can they desert, without an effort of wilfulness, which will require some self-denial and labour, the course on which they have betimes entered, and to which they have adhered in their youthful days. Nor will they surrender the tranquillity and self-approbation, which the retrospect of an irreproachable and applauded youth will afford them, for any of those sordid pleasures and gains, with which the world seduces and ensnares its votaries and its victims. Prepared for the unknown changes of progressive life; for the possible termination of it in the midst of their days; and for an honourable and tranquil old age, should their existence be prolonged; they will rejoice in the reflection, that their early years have been consecrated to God, to the Redeemer of mankind, and to the practice of religious virtue. They will recollect, with gratitude, the attention, which their parents and friends bestowed on the mo-

ral culture of their minds, whilst they were affording them other means of improvement; and they will value the good principles which they inculcated on their regard and the corresponding practice into which they initiated them as the richest endowment and the most estimable inheritance, which they could possibly have conveyed to them.

We cannot now particularly enumerate and illustrate the motives, that might be adduced, for enforcing the exhortation of the text. Its importance and utility, however, are self-evident. Whilst we repose confidence in the good inclinations of the young persons, whom we are now addressing, it is the less necessary to urge on their compliance the apostolic admonition. To yourselves, my young friends! the chief benefit of the observance of it will redound. Your age and condition render it necessary and suitable, and a regard to it will direct and preserve you amidst the perils incident to your years; and lay the best possible foundation for the honour and comfort, the usefulness and happiness of your progressive life. To your parents and friends, anxious for your best interests, you will thus afford inexpressible satisfaction and delight. You will give them reason to hope, that, whether they live or die, you will be pious, virtuous, and

happy; and that they shall recognize their relation to you with transports of joy at the resurrection of the just. To the cause of the Saviour of the world, and the prosperity and duration of his invaluable religion, you will be an accession of ornament and support. If you succeed those, whom death is continually removing from the church and world, in maintaining its honour and influence, we may then bid defiance to death and triumph in the assurance, that the gates of the grave shall not prevail against it. To society and to the world your attachment to the principles and practice of religion will be of singular utility. You will preserve, and you will transmit to future ages, and extend to distant regions, the blessings of knowledge and truth; of salvation and happiness. But, not now to extend our views beyond our own country, your stedfast faith and persevering virtue, concurring with those of others, similarly principled and similarly disposed, will brighten the gloom of present prospects; restore and perpetuate the interrupted prosperity of Britain; convert the fears of its friends into well-founded hopes of its permanent security and glory; and transmit every thing that is most excellent and valuable to future generations. Will you allow me to add, that we direct our

views to you for a succession of those, who shall be, in this and in other such places, in the next age, what your parents and friends are in this? It is my fervent wish, and unfeigned supplication, that when you have served God and your generation according to his will, you and we may be united in the illustrious and indissoluble society of the spirits of the just made perfect.

SERMON XXIV.

THE BENEFIT OF ASSOCIATING WITH THE WISE AND GOOD.

PROVERBS xiii. 20.

He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

THE wisdom and benevolence of our divine former are signally illustrated in the social instincts and affections, with which he has endowed our natures. These lead us to cultivate that mutual union and intercourse, and to exercise those reciprocal offices, in which a great part of our duty consists, and from which we derive much of our present happiness. Man, considered as a mere solitary being, unconnected with others of the same species, and uninterested in their conduct and happiness, would occupy a very contracted sphere

of activity and enjoyment. He would want many of those motives to exertion and of those sources of satisfaction, which extend his usefulness and enhance his felicity. He would resemble the inhabitant of a desolate island, all whose views and cares, all whose wishes and hopes, would terminate in himself;—in some cases incapable of providing for his own security and supply, and in every period of his gloomy and cheerless solitude, unenlivened by social intercourse, unanimated in the exercise of his skill and labour, and bereaved of the choicest consolations of human life. Man, doomed to perpetual solitude, would gradually become a savage in understanding, disposition and manners. He would feel no inducement to cultivate those principles and affections, and to maintain that conduct, which, in a state of society, render him most amiable and useful, and which contribute to refine his temper, exalt his character, and augment his happiness. In that strong propensity to unite and associate with each other; to form attachments of affection and friendship; and to avail ourselves of the counsel, protection and assistance of those, with whom we connect ourselves by an impulse of nature; we, therefore, discern evident traces of the wisdom and goodness of our creator. He has thus pro-

vided, in the most effectual manner, for our discharge of the most important duties of life, and for our enjoying its highest satisfactions and pleasures. But, in order to our deriving from this part of our frame the benefit, to which it is subservient, our benevolent former requires, that the powerful impulse of our social instincts and affections should be directed and regulated in its operation by the superior faculties of our minds; by that judgment and power of reflection, upon the due cultivation and exercise of which the beneficial influence of our passions and feelings depends. The impulse of our social affections will, in many cases, need peculiar guidance and restraint; otherwise we shall defeat the end for which it was designed; and the consequences of indulging it will be reproachful and detrimental. There is hardly any one of our affections, that more requires direction and controul than that of which we are now speaking. A wise selection of associates is absolutely necessary to our safety and true interest. This is a province in which prudence and caution are of the greatest importance and use. The observation and experience of every day teach the necessity of discrimination, and evince the lamentable effects of forming connections and intimacies, precipitately and without previous deliberation. The

maxim of the text is an instructive lesson to the same purpose. Its truth is unquestionable; and it deserves the most serious regard. *He that walketh with wise men shall be wise.*

What we farther propose is to illustrate and confirm this proposition; and then to urge a becoming attention to it.

The declaration of the text is true in the most extensive application of it. The society and conversation of the wise promote wisdom. These are the means of improvement in every kind of valuable and useful knowledge. We cannot give a more satisfactory and decisive evidence of our love of wisdom, of our desire of acquiring it, or of our actual attainment of it, than by associating with persons, who are known to excel in it. But by the *wise* in the text we are to understand the good and pious:—men, whose principles, temper, and conduct, manifest that they are possessed of the truest wisdom—that, which directs them in the pursuit of the highest happiness of their being by an attention to the means, with which it is connected, and by which it is attainable.

Walking with such persons is a familiar expression for associating and conversing with them; adopting their principles and imitating their conduct. To walk with wise men, or with men of piety, probity, and universal virtue,

denotes more than that occasional and accidental intercourse with them, which is almost unavoidable in the present condition of human life; when persons of very different principles and character cannot help meeting together and mingling in society and converse. The concerns of life, the interests of private persons, and of the public community, require our associating, on a variety of occasions, with persons, whose sentiments and conduct, in a religious and moral view, we disapprove. There are many of this character, with whom we are under a necessity of forming important connections; from whose company and conversation we may derive pleasure and improvement; and with whom we may have frequent intercourse, not only without injury, but with advantage both to them and to ourselves. The religion, which wisdom prescribes, and in the exercise of which it consists, by no means, recommends, or justifies, or requires a morose and unsocial temper, and a total seclusion of ourselves from the society of men, who possess many amiable qualities and excellent endowments, though we cannot approve their general character, and ought not to imitate it. In such cases religious prudence will lead us to be circumspect and cautious, and to guard against the possible injury to which we may be liable,

without altogether depriving ourselves of the benefit and pleasure, which the society of such persons may afford. But men of licentious principles and profligate conduct cannot be the chosen and constant companions of those, who feel any just concern for their own virtue and reputation. With such they cannot *walk* in the sense of the text. To their society they will not resort without necessity;—much less with preference, frequency, and delight. They will, habitually and with choice and esteem, converse with the wise. To such they will attach themselves. With them they will cultivate intimacy and friendship. Their chief and chosen intercourse will be with persons of this character; and such they will be desirous of resembling in their principles, dispositions, and conduct.

The phrase of *walking with the wise* denotes that kind of selection and preference, of affection and attachment, of society and intercourse, which is the result of deliberation and discrimination, and which is productive of similarity of judgment, temper, and practice. *Can two walk together,* says the apostle, *except they be agreed?* In the views, inclinations, and pursuits of those, who habitually associate together, there must be a considerable resemblance; there must be a mutual approbation; and upon these

general principles, their society is founded: without them it cannot long subsist, nor, indeed, subsist at all, with any degree of satisfaction and reciprocal complacency. "He who thus walketh with wise men," says Solomon, "shall be wise."

The truth of this proposition we shall now proceed to establish. For this purpose we may observe,

1st, That a person, who associates with the wise, or with the virtuous and good, will be thought wise: he will thus give evidence of his right to this appellation; and he will be acknowledged and honoured as such by all, who are capable of forming a just and candid judgment of his disposition and character. There is not a more concise, nor, in most cases, a more just and certain rule of determining men's disposition and character than by observing their chosen and habitual companions. By the complexion and conduct of those with whom they associate and converse, we may discover their taste and temper, their sentiments and practice. We need not pursue any laborious investigation. We need not be at the pains of watching their unguarded hours, and marking, by long and diligent attention, the course of their general conduct. It will be sufficient to know, what kind of society they prefer; who are their

selected associates and friends; and to whom they are most attached in affection and intercourse; in order to enable us to form a just opinion of their most secret and unobserved disposition, and of those parts of their character, which may be most concealed from general inspection. As this is a method of judging, which will seldom lead us into error; as it is easy and familiar as well as certain;—it is the method which is commonly adopted. However men may differ in their own principles or practice, all seem to concur, by a kind of spontaneous and universal agreement, in this mode of judging concerning one another. Every man pronounces sentence on another by the known character of his associates. There is no evidence, therefore, that is more decisive and satisfactory, and to which men more generally appeal, when they wish to determine concerning a character, of which they are ignorant or doubtful, than that which is furnished by the conduct of chosen companions and friends.

He who wishes to be thought wise, to acquire and maintain an amiable and respectable character, and thus to be esteemed and honoured, must *walk with the wise*, with men of known piety and virtue. This is the only sure method of obtaining reputation in the world, and that

respect and confidence which usually accompany it. This is the most likely method of conciliating the good will and kind offices, not only of those, who are themselves the votaries of religion and virtue, but of men of every class and character. Every man is, in his judgment, and upon that mature reflection which directs and fixes his attachment, a friend to unaffected piety and probity; and will render a tribute of homage and praise to virtues, in which, perhaps, he does not personally excel.

By *walking with the wise*, we shall also manifest a rectitude of judgment and an integrity of heart, the consciousness of which will be a certain source of *self-approbation*. Beside the satisfaction, naturally resulting from that reputation for wisdom, in the opinion of others, which we shall thus establish;—a satisfaction, which every ingenuous mind will be anxious to secure, and to the value of which it cannot be insensible; we cannot help feeling a laudable pride and peculiar pleasure in our preference of wise and virtuous associates. We shall reflect on such a preference with self-complacency. We shall think ourselves happy in having been led to a selection, so honourable to our own judgment, so just in itself, and so important and beneficial in its effects. No man ever discriminated in a case of such consequence, and pre-

ferred the society of the wise and worthy to that of the licentious and profligate without self-applause and self-congratulation. This is a testimony in favour of religious wisdom and virtue; a tribute of esteem and respect to what is most excellent and laudable, and most conducive to every valuable interest of our being, which no man ever rendered without a secret glow of delight; without that self-approbation, which is the present recompence of every expression of a just discernment and a virtuous disposition.

Moreover, *Walking with the wise* is an evidence, both to others and to ourselves; that we are wise in the judgment of unerring rectitude; that the greatest and best of beings, our present observer and final judge, will acknowledge our title to this appellation; and that he approves our conduct.

2dly, *He that walketh with wise men shall be wise,* because his regard to religious wisdom, both in the principles and the practice of it, will be thus maintained and continued. The society of the wise and good will be a kind of sacred asylum, where virtue will be exposed to no assault of temptation; where it will be in no danger of being seduced and corrupted. From such companions we can derive no criminal bias and prejudice. In their conversation or example nothing can occur, that will tend to

relax our resolution and vigilance; to impair or obstruct the influence of religious principles; and to indispose us for a corresponding practice. Under their protection we shall escape those arts that are daily used in order to delude and mislead the unwary. Their established and acknowledged sobriety and virtue will be like a broad shield extended over us for our defence and security. We shall be inaccessible to those who lie in wait to ensnare and deceive;—who *go about seeking whom they may devour*. We shall be invulnerable by the most open or insidious attacks. Nay, we shall be, in a great degree, exempt from the seduction of the unprincipled and licentious. Awed by the known character of our associates and hopeless of success, they will not dare to assault persons that are so well-guarded; they will not make an experiment, that is likely to prove fruitless.

As we wish, then, to escape temptation, and to be out of the way of danger, *walking with the wise* is of the greatest importance. The choice of such companions is a declaration and avowal of our sentiments and purpose, which will be the means of preserving us from a variety of snares and temptations, to which we might otherwise be exposed. Having actually enlisted ourselves under the standard of wisdom; having associated ourselves with its acknow-

ledged votaries; having formed a deliberate resolution of adhering to them and of sharing their conflicts and their interests;—we shall not be an easy prey to seducers; we shall be firm and fearless; and deriving fortitude and strength from our associates, we shall not be prevailed upon to surrender the principles we have imbibed, or to desert the practice, to which we are devoted. Our mutual union and attachment will render us invincible. Each of us will guard the integrity and animate the virtuous resistance of the other; if any temptation should assail us. A sense of honour and a spirit of emulation will preserve us from exposing, not merely ourselves, but the companions and friends, whose interest and reputation are dear to us as our own, to merited reproach. But it is not merely security, that is the beneficial result of *walking with the wise;* for we may add,

3dly, That those, who habitually associate with such persons, will be gradually more and more established; and they will also be progressive and improving in religion and virtue. What can have a greater tendency to confirm good principles and dispositions, and to increase their practical influence, than the society of the wise and good! What is more pernicious in these respects than the conversation and conduct

of the profane and licentious? It is a kind of negative recommendation; it is a very partial praise of virtuous companions; that they will do us no injury; that they will preserve us from being seduced and corrupted. In their society we shall be led to examine the evidence of those religious principles, which we adopt, as the bond of our union and the rule of our conduct. We shall be aided in forming just sentiments of the doctrines and motives of religion. We shall be encouraged in every inquiry, which will tend to establish our faith and hope: and we cannot fail, under the influence of their example, and by the assistance which they afford us, of enlarging our acquaintance with important truth; of being daily more and more confirmed in our attachment to it; and of being *able to give every one a reason of the hope that is in us*. When difficulties and objections occur, we shall have the advantage of their superior wisdom to aid us in resolving them; under the sanction of their authority and counsel we shall be preserved from prejudice and error; and prevented from hastily surrendering principles and hopes, which they value, but which others may treat with indifference, and, perhaps, with contempt and ridicule. Countenanced and encouraged by their religious profession, by their regular attendance on public means of instruc-

tion, and by their concern to improve the opportunities of acquiring knowledge and virtue that are afforded them; we shall be able to stem the tide of fashionable irreligion; and, when the neglect of sacred institutions prevails, bear the testimony of our conduct to their obligation and utility. Nor will their society contribute merely to preserve us steady in our attachment to the principles and profession of religion, and in the use of those means of improvement, which God has ordained, and which our chosen companions have found beneficial;—but it will aid and animate us in the practice of every personal and social duty. Their example will be an incentive to our emulation, urge us to the cultivation and exercise of every amiable and laudable virtue, and induce us to persevere and proceed in well-doing.

Farther,

4thly, Those who *walk with the wise* shall enjoy the satisfactions attendant on an established and progressive piety and virtue. In the society of such we shall contract no guilt; we shall incur no disgrace. We shall escape the remorse and self-reproach, as well as the subsequent shame and distress, which the associates of the profane and wicked must expect to experience. We shall have no dread of acknowledging, in the

most undisguised manner, our acquaintance with them. We need not blush on any occasion to avow it; nor apprehend any injury, either to our mental peace or external reputation, from intercourse with them. Do we say, that acquaintance with persons of wisdom and virtue can be no disgrace or detriment to us? A supposition of this kind would be reproachful to the understanding and heart of any one that could for a moment admit it. With the excellent of the earth; with those who are *wise* in the highest sense of the appellation, who *fear God* and *keep his commandments* and are interested in his favour, it is an honour to associate. We may glory in being acknowledged as the friends and companions of such persons. This is a distinction, to which ambition may aspire and of which pride may boast. But there are also a calmness and tranquillity of mind, which this kind of society will impart and preserve, arising from a consciousness of our security and from that repose of every turbulent and distressing passion, which attends it. In associating with the good and pious, we experience no anxiety and terror. We are satisfied, that no valuable interest is at stake. We are confident, that our integrity and virtue are exposed to no danger. Nay, more, in the interchange of pure and refined affections of a social nature; in that delicate sympathy and sensibi-

lity, which kindred spirits feel from mutual intercourse; and in the prospect of that continued, uninterrupted, and indissoluble union, which will subsist between them; there are a delight and pleasure, of which those who are companions in iniquity can have no imagination.

How excellent and divine the satisfaction of being associates, under the influence of principles and affections, that unite us by bonds, which no vicissitudes of time and which death itself cannot sever!—the satisfaction of confirming and encouraging one another in the practice of that piety and virtue, which dignify our nature, and in the pursuit of that happiness, which is perfect and everlasting!—the satisfaction of commencing and cementing a society and friendship, that shall survive the dissolution of every mortal connection, triumph over the grave, and be durable as eternity! To him who *walketh with the wise* this satisfaction belongs; and he who possesses it, who prefers the attainment of it above every other good, and who pursues it with constancy and zeal, is *truly wise.*

Once more,

5thly, *He that walketh with the wise shall* finally obtain the reward of true wisdom and virtue. At the end of his course, and in the period of judgment and retribution, it will appear that he has made the wisest choice. No

distressing reflections will imbitter and becloud his last moments in the review of life. No terrifying prospects will disquiet his spirit, when the awful hour of separation from every worldly connection and interest arrives. Preserved from the seduction of vice; established, persevering, and progressive in every good principle and practice, by the counsel, example, and influence of his associates, his regret at parting with them will be allayed by the hope of a re-union; and he will leave the world, animated by the prospect of a happiness, after which he has aspired and for which he is qualified;—a happiness, consisting in the society of good and blessed spirits, of Jesus, his saviour, and of God, the father and judge of all.

Nothing now remains but that we impress the maxim of the text, so true in itself, so conformable to universal experience, so beneficial in its influence, upon our hearts.

It teaches us, who are entitled to the appellation of *wise*. Not the men of learning and science; not the men of worldly prudence and policy; not the subtle and sagacious in speculative disquisitions. There is a species of wisdom much more excellent and useful than every endowment of this kind:—the wisdom of minding the one thing needful; of honouring God and seeking an interest in his favour, and of securing

that *good part, which shall never be taken away from us.* He is wise, who has a just sense of the importance of these great ends of his being; who pursues them in the appointed way and with becoming activity and diligence. Let us value this wisdom, and be ambitious of attaining it; of distinguishing ourselves by the exercise of it in every purpose and pursuit. This is the only wisdom, that will stand the test of the most accurate and impartial scrutiny; which we ourselves shall approve in the most trying seasons; and which will be approved by the final judge.

This subject also teaches us, who are they, that deserve to be held in the highest estimation, and whose society and friendship we should be most anxious to cultivate. They are those who will not corrupt our religious principles; who will not relax our virtuous resolutions; who will not lead us into sin; and who will not be accessary to our present disgrace and final perdition. No talents and endowments, no wealth and influence, no powers of contributing to our amusement and pleasure, no qualities, which are in many respects lovely and laudable, should so far blind our judgment, captivate our esteem, and engage our confidence, as to induce us to select those for our associates, however thus recommended to us, who would be likely by reasoning or ridicule, by enticement or example, to make us regard-

less of God and religion, of our souls, and of an eternal world, and to lead us into temptation, iniquity, and future ruin. These are not the men, whose society we should seek, and with whom we should be fond of cultivating intimate connection and frequent intercourse. The reason is obvious, because no benefit or pleasure, which we can derive from them, is sufficient to compensate the injury we may suffer. True wisdom admonishes us to shun such companions. It loudly calls on the young and unwary and unexperienced to avoid them; and to select those for their associates and friends, who, by manifesting a just concern for their own virtue and happiness, will be most likely to preserve and promote theirs. In every stage of life much depends on the character of our chosen and intimate companions. But it is of the highest importance; it is of indispensible necessity, that those who are entering into life should be prudent and cautious in their choice. They are more in danger than persons of more advanced life, more mature judgment, and greater experience. They are more easily captivated and ensnared. The consequences of a wise or imprudent choice will be extensive and permanent. As they value their honour and interest; their comfort and hope, both in life and death; the esteem of men and the approba-

tion of God; and every thing valuable to them both in time and eternity; let them associate habitually and intimately with men of integrity and virtue;—men, who fear God and keep his commandments. Let them ever remember, for their direction and encouragement, that *he who walketh with the wise shall be wise,* and for their alarm and caution, that *a companion of fools shall be destroyed.*

SERMON XXV.

THE FOLLY AND DANGER OF ASSOCIATING WITH THE WICKED.

PROVERBS xiii. 20.

He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but A COMPANION OF FOOLS SHALL BE DESTROYED.

How much our honour and happiness depend upon the character of our associates, it requires little reflection and experience to determine. A very slight acquaintance with the principles and passions of human nature and with the established course of the world, is sufficient to inform us, that every valuable interest of our being is connected with the choice of our companions. This is a truth, which the wisdom and experience of every age have inculcated; which men of every rank and character have been ready to allow; and which it is, therefore, more neces-

sary to enforce on the attention than to demonstrate to the conviction of mankind. It is one of those maxims, that are so obvious and so universally acknowledged, as to require no proof; and yet, like other self-evident and incontestible principles, in the discovery of which the mind makes no effort, it escapes notice; and for want of being duly considered, fails of producing its proper effect. The emphatical manner, in which it is announced in the text, commands not only the assent of the understanding, but that attention to its truth and importance, which is calculated to impress the heart and to influence the conduct. *A companion of* FOOLS *shall be* DESTROYED.

What an unamiable, degrading, and disreputable character do these words describe! The men of licentious principles and practice, the profane and wicked, who manifest no regard to God and providence, to Christ and the gospel, to their present duty or future destination, are the persons, to whom the appellation of *fools* is applied; and who that duly considers their sentiments and conduct can dispute the propriety of the appellation? No affectation of wisdom; no talents or acquirements, that may be justly denominated wisdom, if they merely terminate in science and policy and secular prudence; no tribute of popular respect and praise can exempt

from the charge of folly, however degrading and reproachful, those who pay no regard to the will and favour of the supreme sovereign and final judge; who are anxious neither to honour nor obey him, neither to avert his displeasure nor to secure his approbation and friendship.

It is an undoubted truth, confirmed by just reasoning and the testimony of divine revelation, that *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*, and that they are *men of good understanding, who keep his commandments*. It is also equally true, that *fools make a mock at sin*; trifle with temptations to it; pursue the practice of it without restraint, and are heedless of its final consequences. To be the companion of such persons; to select them for associates; to avow attachment to them; to imbibe their principles; and to imitate their practice, must, therefore, be a distinction, which no one that has a just sense of the dignity of his intelligent and immortal nature, or of his Christian principles and hopes, can be ambitious to seek and willing to acknowledge. There is a pride, a becoming and laudable pride, which should lead us to consider the appellation of a *companion of fools* as a title of indignity and reproach; to renounce the preference of such associates; to disclaim attachment to them; and to disavow every kind of connection with them, that would

subject us to an imputation so debasing and dishonourable. The folly of the irreligious and wicked, separate from every other consideration, should induce us to avoid their society. There is an ignominy attending it, which we should be fearful of incurring; so that if we were secure against every other inconvenience or injury, to which it will inevitably expose us, this is of itself a reason, why we should not unite in habits of intimate acquaintance and intercourse with such persons. *A companion of fools* is a denomination of disgrace. It is a character, to which are annexed contempt and reproach. This is the view of it which is exhibited by Solomon in the text, in order to excite alarm and caution; and to prevent the heedless and unwary from being seduced by false appearances, and from imagining, that they can preserve their reputation in the society of the licentious and profane.

Some ancient copies of the Hebrew text, and that particularly from which the Greek translation was made, express this sentiment in a manner different from our present reading. *A companion of fools shall be known.* No art and caution, no disguise and dissimulation, can prevent the discovery of his true character. With such associates it is impossible for him to maintain his honour. In their disgrace he must un-

avoidably be involved. He must share their reproach: for *for there is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity can hide themselves,* so as altogether to escape the cognizance and just judgment of their fellow-men, and much less the inspection and condemnation of the all-knowing observer and final judge. This is an argument against associating with the wicked, which, perhaps, it would be useless to address to those, that are already corrupted. They have lost that virtuous sensibility, those delicate sentiments and feelings, that concern for their dignity and reputation, that solicitude to maintain the respect and esteem of the wise and good, and that desire of securing an interest in the approbation and favour of God, to which an argument of this kind is adapted and which would be most likely to give it effect. But, addressing those who are better instructed and better disposed, we may make an appeal to that sense of honour and to that laudable solicitude for securing the good opinion of men and the approbation of God, from which this argument derives its principal efficacy. Convinced of the folly of irreligion and vice, the disgrace, incurred by those, who are chargeable with this folly, will be one preservative against associating with them. The *companion of fools* is a character which our judg-

ment and feelings concur to condemn. We shall not degrade and debase ourselves so much as to unite in principle, intercourse and practice with persons of this character. *O my soul!* will each of us say to himself, *come not thou into their secret: unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united! I have hated the congregation of evil doers and will not sit with the wicked.*

But the dishonour of associating with the wicked is not the only consideration suggested in the text. It intimates to us also the pernicious and fatal consequences of this practice. *A companion of fools shall be destroyed.* The expression in the text is very general and comprehensive. It includes every kind of evil and distress, which a regard to our interest as well as our honour would make us anxious to shun: and the declaration of the text is conformable to fact and experience. How true it is, and what a lesson of caution it teaches, will appear by a recital of the following particulars.

1st, The society of the profane and wicked tends to destroy those moral and religious principles, which are the only effectual preservatives of human integrity and virtue. The chief of these, and that which deserves first to be noticed, is "a becoming reverence of God." How much this principle contributes to guard men against temptation and vice; and what an incentive it

is to circumspect and regular conduct, it is needless to shew. Its beneficial influence is peculiar to no age or nation of the world, and to no one class or description of men, exclusively of others. If there be any sentiment, that has more generally and uniformly prevailed than another, and that has contributed in an eminent degree to preserve from profligacy and to promote holiness and virtue, it is that awe of God, which takes early possession of the mind, and which maintains some influence even when almost every other good principle is lost. Those whom this principle cannot restrain or reclaim from the practice of iniquity will occasionally feel the alarm and uneasiness, which it has a tendency to produce; and they will, therefore, endeavour to extirpate or subdue it. In the society of persons, who exclude God from their minds; who neglect all the appointed means of cherishing and preserving a suitable regard to him, and who allow themselves no opportunity for serious reflection, no motive will occur that is calculated to excite and revive just thoughts of God and Providence, and a lively sense of the divine presence and inspection. In the society of those, who profane the name of God, and who are accustomed, by ridicule or false reasoning, to degrade the importance and depreciate the use of religious institutions, and to speak con-

temptuously of persons, who think it their duty regularly to observe them; the mind will gradually lose that veneration of the deity, that concern for his honour, and those desires of obtaining his favour and avoiding his displeasure, which are the only effectual security against temptation. Persons of this character will feel themselves interested in adopting licentious notions of religion, of its duties and sanctions; they will assist and encourage one another in discarding those sentiments, which can only serve to disquiet them; and they will form a kind of confederacy against those principles, which tend to restrain their practice and imbitter their pleasures. Intercourse with one another will confirm and increase their disinclination to reflect on the being, attributes and character of God. Habitual profaneness will terminate in obduracy. Each one will abet and encourage the other in a disregard and contempt of those religious scruples, that would check their career of vice and disturb them with self-reproach and terror.

Farther,

"The authority of conscience" is another preservative from vice and encouragement to virtuous practice, which the society of the profane and wicked has a tendency to destroy. Companions in iniquity studiously conceal from

each other the remorse and compunction they feel, when they are constrained to reflect upon their conduct. They know, that a discovery of their mental uneasiness would be the subject of raillery; and that every indication of virtuous sensibility would be deemed superstitious weakness and timidity. Careful, therefore, to dissemble and disguise their feelings in the presence of their associates, and recurring to means for quieting the remonstrances of their own minds; they gradually experience less uneasiness, and find it possible, by disregarding the checks and reproaches of conscience, to silence its complaints and to subvert its authority. For some time this inward monitor will be an unwelcome and distressing companion. Dread of its rebukes will put them upon expedients for destroying its power; and the apparent success of others, who either feel little remorse, or disguise their feelings, will encourage them to divert, resist or stifle the remonstrances of conscience, till it ceases to alarm and disturb them. Solitude and reflection, or intercourse with men of religious principle and practice, would serve to support its just authority and furnish occasion for the salutary exercise of its powers. Whereas the society of the licentious and profligate, to which those, who are unhappy in their own minds, recur for relief, will give them ease, merely

by perverting the judgment of conscience, or deadening its sensibility:—the case of opiates, which, when their temporary effect subsides, render succeeding pain and anguish more intolerable.

Another principle of religious virtue, which is of great importance and use, and which is liable to be injured and gradually destroyed by associating with the wicked, is "a sense of honour, and that desire of preserving the esteem and approbation of the wise and good, which it naturally produces."

In youthful minds this is a principle of singular utility. It creates a dread and abhorrence of practices, which are dishonourable and ignominious. Nor is there any more formidable symptom of degeneracy and danger than that contempt of the good opinion of the world, that indifference about it, and that disregard to the best method of securing it, which mark the character of the corrupt and profligate. When the reputation and praise, connected, by the appointment of Providence and by the judgment of mankind, with a virtuous and exemplary conduct, are deemed of no value; when they are slighted and despised; the consequence may be well feared and deprecated. This is an evidence of a mind, already corrupted, and in danger of actually deserving the reproach, which

it discovers no solicitude to avoid. Of those, who are modest and timid; who blush and tremble under an apprehension of forfeiting the esteem and incurring the reproach of the wise and good; and who have a just sense of the honour and approbation, which a blameless and exemplary conduct will ensure; we may entertain the most encouraging hopes. But of persons, who are heedless and unconcerned what judgment is formed concerning them; who are bold and fearless in pursuing a forbidden course; and who have no sense of shame and solicitude to conceal their follies and vices; we may pronounce, that they have broken through all the ordinary restraints of religion and virtue, and that they are likely to become profligate and irreclaimable. Such is the deplorable state, to which associates in iniquity tend. Encouraging and emboldening one another, they not only despise the esteem, but defy the censure of observers. Vainly imagining, that their guilt is diminished by their number, and that their conduct is less criminal and reprehensible, because others partake with them of the blame and reproach, which they incur; they are ready to conclude, that they shall either escape deserved censure, or that they can screen and secure one another against its apprehended consequences.

By a similar folly they renounce and resist

the influence of another very important principle of religion and virtue; that is, "the dread of future judgment and retribution." These are subjects too serious and too alarming for their meditation. When they occasionally intrude, they dismiss them without due reflection; and as they are distant and future, they put off as evil, the day in which they ought to be regarded, and fortify one another in a criminal inattention to them; in doubt or disbelief of their reality; or in vain and ineffectual purposes of duly considering and preparing for them, when the proper season arrives. Whatever be the fallacy to which they recur, and by which they delude one another, it answers the purpose of relieving them under present disquietude, and of freeing them from those restraints and terrors, which would retard and disturb them in their career of folly and vice.

Such as we have now endeavoured to describe is the injury, which the principles of religion and virtue are likely to receive from the society of the licentious and wicked; and if these are corrupted and destroyed, it is in vain to expect any traces of religion and virtue in the outward conduct. When the understanding and heart are thus lamentably vitiated, what the practice will be it is very easy to de-

termine. The proposition of the text, in its reference to the *character* of those, who associate with the wicked, is therefore undoubtedly true: *a companion of fools shall be destroyed.* Every other injurious consequence must naturally follow. Accordingly, we may observe,

2dly. That persons of this character destroy their own usefulness. Whatever abilities and talents they may possess; however honourable the rank and station they occupy; however numerous and interesting their connections in a domestic or civil capacity:—they disqualify themselves by the choice of their associates for any important and useful service. Their influence counteracted by their example; their counsel contradicted by their conduct, can do no good. But why should we speak of the counsel and influence of persons, leagued in a confederacy against the interests of virtue and religion? What good can be expected from any advice they can give, or from any of their efforts? Spiritless and feeble, and consequently ineffectual, must be *their* endeavours to advance the happiness of others, who are culpably negligent of their own. As individuals, they are pernicious members of the society to which they belong; but as parents or masters, or in other endeared and important relations of life, they are so far from

having any claim or pretension to usefulness, that they spread mischief and ruin through all their connections. Inferiors and dependents, seduced and encouraged by their example, will be in danger of breaking through every restraint, of violating every obligation, and of involving themselves and those who have the charge of them in distress and misery.

3dly. A *companion of fools* destroys the only sure foundation of comfort and hope. He discards the only principles, that can administer consolation and relief on a variety of occasions; and that can give him peaceful reflections in the review of life and encouraging prospects of futurity. He pursues a conduct, which must be attended with present anguish and which must terminate in future misery. He unites himself to companions, who cannot shield him in the season of calamity; who cannot soothe or succour him in the hour of his greatest distress; and on whose fidelity and friendship, were their power commensurate with their wishes, he cannot rely. If his *associates* can impart no relief to his agitated and trembling spirit in the joyless season of adversity, and in the awful moment of nature's last conflict, neither can his own mind furnish any sources of comfort or discover any

stable ground of hope. Estranged from God; subject to the accusations of conscience; and alarmed by the prospect of futurity and by the apprehension of an unheeded judgment and recompence, his feelings and his fears render him incapable of receiving consolation. His case is also aggravated by the consideration that this hour of anguish and horror is precipitated by the course he has pursued, at the instigation and under the encouragement of profligate companions. For we may add,

4thly. That the associate of fools not only sacrifices his reputation, squanders his substance, and injures his health, but contracts the duration even of life itself. We shall say nothing in this place of vices of public notoriety and infamy, which render those who commit them amenable to the laws of their country, and most of which have been the effects of the seduction of the abandoned:—We shall not appeal to the records of our criminal courts and to the register of those who have fallen early sacrifices to offended justice for evidence of the truth of Solomon's maxim: *a companion of fools shall be destroyed.* But we shall observe in general, that those who are associates in vice are commonly associates in disease and distress; that the course

they pursue frequently terminates in an impaired constitution, an impoverished fortune, and a premature death. Once more.

5thly. The *companion* of *fools* shall be punished with *everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power.* No league and combination in wickedness can avail against the sentence of the almighty sovereign and righteous judge of mankind. His immutable decree dooms the workers of iniquity, however firmly united, and however fearless their confederacy may make them, to future perdition. And it will be one circumstance of aggravation in their destiny, that those, who were associates in vice, and who contributed by their mutual intercourse and example to encourage and harden one another in impiety and sin, shall be associates in misery. Doomed to the same abode and to endure a similar punishment, their mutual recrimination will enhance the measure of their distress. How painful the recollection, that they have been instruments of destruction to one another! How agonizing the interview between those, who have been accessary to each other's vice and ruin! How dreadful the scene, in which the angry spirits of men, once united in affection and friendship, shall be so many fiends and demons to upbraid and torment one another! And yet how probable, how certain

this ultimate issue of confederate vice! Does the sinner profess regard for his companion? Does he associate with affection and attachment? Has he any of those feelings, which possess the hearts of friends? And can he bear to contemplate the scenes now exhibited? To forebode the situation, in which the just judgment of God will place him, and to think, that the character of a tempter will be exchanged for the office of a tormentor? If there be any aggravation of iniquity, that renders it in the highest degree heinous and inexcusable; that manifests a mind destitute of every benevolent sentiment and tender feeling, and that exposes the persons who are chargeable with it to the abhorrence of mankind and to the severest sentence of an angry judge; it is that which leads men to associate together, not for the purpose of friendly and amusing intercourse, not for the purpose soothing each other's cares and sorrows and heightening each other's joys—Vain and groundless pretence!—but with a deliberate design of corrupting one another's principles; of relaxing the restraints of virtue, religion, conscience, and the fear of God and futurity; of animating and emboldening one another in the pursuit of criminal gratifications, and of fortifying one another against every argument and motive that tend to reclaim them.

From companions, such as we have described, the folly, not to say the malignity, of whose conduct deserves to be universally reprobated, may the providence and grace of God preserve all who hear me! Let the young, especially, beware of such associates. Let no pretence of amusement and pleasure seduce them to their disgrace and ruin! From the first suggestion that tends to undermine the influence of religious principles, let them, suspecting that evil is meditated against them, turn away with a laudable indignation! Let the maxim of the text be always in their recollection, and serve as a faithful, awakening monitor of their danger: *a companion of fools shall be destroyed.*

END OF VOL. I.

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